A150 Voices and texts

The Voices and Texts of Authority

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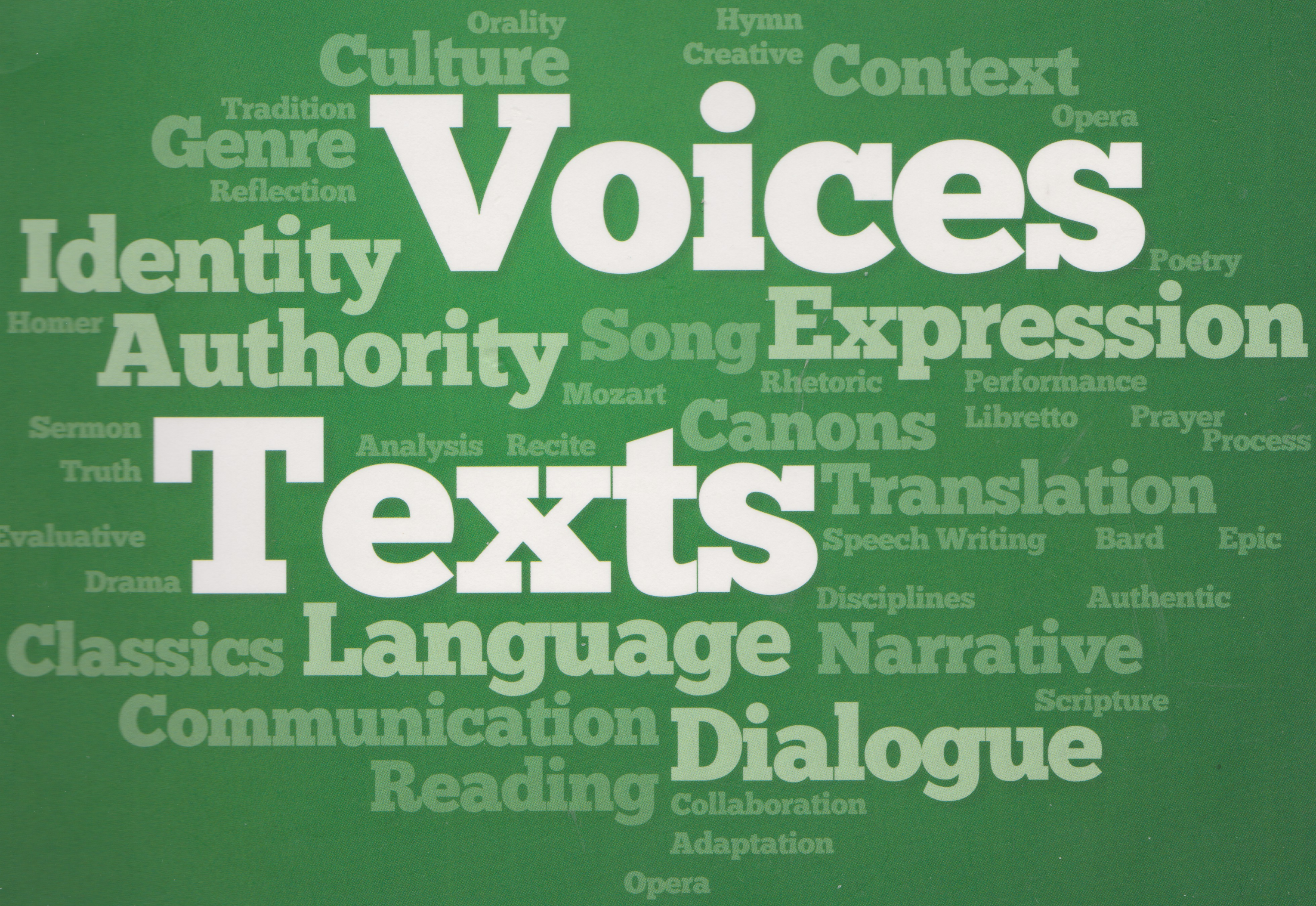
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A150 Voices and texts

The Open University

Book 1

The Voices and Texts of Authority

Edited by Lynda Prescott

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Introduction

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Meanings of 'authority'

Working through the activities set for the first week of study on A150 *Voices and texts* will have helped you to recognise the wide range of references evoked by these two key terms, and the variety of contexts within which they can be used. In Book 1, many of the meanings of 'voices' and 'texts' that you have already encountered in the Study Companion will remain in play, but we will now explore these concepts in relation to a specific theme: authority. Like 'voices' and 'texts', 'authority' is a term that is familiar in everyday usage, and it too comes loaded with a range of meanings and associations. The first activity in Book 1 is intended to tease out some of these different meanings, so that as you work through this book you are aware of the word's various implications.

Activity

Here are a few sentences in which the word 'authority' is used with slightly different meanings. (You may well be able to think of others.)

(a) 'By the authority invested in me as Vice-Chancellor of The Open University, I confer on you the degree of BA (Honours) in Humanities.'

(b) 'Our local authority seems uninterested in community-building.'

(c) 'Someone in authority needs to sort this out.'

(d) 'I have it on good authority that the 16.55 from Euston arrived on time.'

(e) 'We'd like our next team-captain to be someone with authority.'

(f) 'She's an authority on international relations in the 1920s.'

Now go to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) online and look up the list of possible meanings for 'authority'. You'll see that they are grouped into two main branches: 'I. Power to enforce obedience' and 'II. Power to influence action, opinion, belief.'

The *OED* online is included in Oxford Reference Online, a resource you have already used in an activity in the Study Companion. You can find a link to it on the A150 website.

Without worrying too much about the finer distinctions under each of these headings, try grouping the sentences above under the two main definitions offered by the *OED*.

Discussion

The various senses of 'authority' do tend to shade into each other, but it looks as though the first three sentences would fit somewhere under the first definition with its ideas of 'power over others', and the last three under the second, involving 'power to influence'. The distinctions are made more complicated, though, by the fact that sometimes when we use the term 'authority' we are referring not to power itself, but to a person or group of people who exercise that power (sentence (b) is an especially good example). In some cases, such as in sentence (f), assumptions about knowledge and/or judgement are rolled up into the idea of authority, too. So if you found it difficult to disentangle the two sets of meanings, don't worry too much: dictionary definitions, helpful though they are, can only take us so far towards a full working understanding of a complex concept such as 'authority'. We can probably only get to grips with it by looking at it in detail, from a number of different angles, as we shall do in the course of this book.

It is significant, however, that 'power' features in both the main senses of 'authority' outlined in the *OED*. Of course, 'power' is another term with many shades of meaning – I won't spend time on ever-expanding dictionary exercises, but most of these meanings have to do with bringing about particular effects or having the ability to make things happen. Across a vast spectrum of subjects, from politics to the physical sciences, 'power' can suggest forces at work, either causing change or preventing things from changing. We could see power as a dynamic concept, then, while authority, in its various guises, is often an attempt to dress power in permanent-seeming clothes: the power to command respect not just today but in the long term. Sometimes permanence, or at least long-lastingness, is embodied in traditions, rules and conventions and the respect people have for them. We will return to these concepts as we continue opening up some of the key terms you will encounter in the chapters that follow.

Authors and authority

It is no accident that the term 'authority' contains inside it another term you will come across frequently in A150: 'author'. This is because the two words have a common root, the Latin verb *augere*, meaning 'to increase, promote, originate'. Although in contemporary usage the meaning of the word 'author' is usually restricted to someone who produces writings, in older usage 'author' had a more general meaning of 'maker'. This usage is still preserved in the expression that we are all 'authors of our own lives'. The author, then, is an individual agent, and authorship implies potential for creativity. The term 'authority', although originally springing from the same root, has over time become associated with social forces or standards, and is linked to ideas of power, often via 'expert knowledge' which commands both our respect and that of others. So there is a tension between the two related words: 'author' is about the individual but 'authority' is about a collective dimension of our lives. Another important point is that it is difficult to talk for long about authority without being conscious that it depends on consent, a point I shall explore further in the next section.

Structures of authority

As a student of Arts and Humanities, you are probably very conscious of the importance of cultural factors in shaping the texts, processes and performances that you will come across in *Voices and texts*. In this first book, awareness of 'cultural context' is angled towards some specific questions, as we explore, in the next four chapters, the social and cultural structures that confer authority on certain products and practices.

So what do we mean by 'structures of authority'? It might be helpful to think back to those two main definitions of authority in the *OED*. Let us first consider 'power to enforce obedience'.

Activity

Think of two or three examples in your everyday life where you are conscious of obeying, or complying with, authority-backed rules. How does 'consent' come in?

Discussion

The range of possibilities here is probably endless, and the rules you selected might range from the laws of the land to regulations affecting smaller groups of people. For example, you might have picked out things such as filling in official forms or observing traffic signs. When it comes to the legal frameworks that regulate our behaviour – in small ways as well as large – although the finer details may be familiar only to specialists, as ordinary citizens we are expected to understand how to stay 'within the law', and we consent to these laws implicitly. (Dissent can, of course, take the form of protest, with a view to getting the law changed, or of transgression, with the risk of punishment.) In the case of more localised structures of authority, we are probably conscious of having actively 'bought into' the rules and conventions governing our actions. For example, as an Open University student, you will have accepted the need to follow the OU's regulations about assessment in order to achieve a qualification. By joining the University, you have agreed to comply with these, and other, regulations.

Apart from such overt structures of authority, however, our actions and beliefs, and the way we see ourselves relating to society, may be governed by less overt forms of authority – the kind that we take for granted. This is where the *OED*'s 'power to influence' definition comes in. Consensus, collective opinion, and accepted forms or conventions are all tremendously important in the field of culture. So, as you work through this book, you will begin to analyse the means by which certain texts and voices are either granted authority or draw on conventions of authority.

Canons and classics

The final sentence of the preceding section includes the phrase 'either granted authority or draw on conventions of authority'. The 'either … or' is all-important. As we shall see, the first two chapters of Book 1 deal largely with the kind of authority that is granted to certain texts after they have been in circulation for a time. You will encounter the concept of 'canons' in relation to the academic disciplines of Religious Studies, Literature and Music, the common ground being that 'canonical works' have been given a seal of approval by relevant authorities. Originally the word 'canon' meant a catalogue of religious texts that were recognised as genuine, but it is now frequently used with reference to artworks in a number of fields to mean works that are recognised as worthy of special attention and respect. In Chapter 1, you will discover that the idea of a canon of religious texts is not absolutely rigid, and in relation to literary and musical works it is more fluid still. (The term 'canon' has an additional and very specific meaning in music, where it is used to describe a musical form in which different parts or voices imitate each other. That more specialised meaning is not part of our discussion here.) Sometimes, genuineness is still the issue at stake in establishing literary and musical canons: for example, Shakespeare scholars might debate the authorship of previously unknown or misattributed plays from the late Elizabethan and Jacobean period to decide whether or not they belong in the 'Shakespeare canon'. More often, though, the concept of the canon is governed by judgements about quality and status, the central question being: which musical works, or which literary texts, are considered important enough to merit continuing attention, from performers, critics, teachers, syllabus-setters and so on?

Sometimes canonical musical and literary works are called 'classics', and there can be an overlap between the terms 'canonical' and 'classic'. But it is important to bear in mind that a canon is a catalogue or list of works whose importance is backed by some kind of collective authority (sometimes this is a specific, concrete list backed by a specific authority, as in the case of religious canons; sometimes it is a notional list backed by a more diverse collection of authoritative figures such as critics and academics, as in the case of literary and musical works). As you study this book you will also encounter the term 'classical' used in other ways, in relation to what is often called 'classical music' – a term often used to mean more than just 'music of the classical period' – and also in the name of the academic discipline Classical Studies. As ever, we need to be alert to different usages and slightly different meanings when the same term crops up in different contexts. And, to step outside the field of definition and usage for a moment, we also need to be alert to the fact that the authority embodied in canonical or classic texts can filter through into later texts that draw on or even 'remake' versions of the originals. We shall see this process at work in Chapters 3 and 4 of this book.

Genres

Another term used in slightly different ways in different academic disciplines is 'genre'. In Books 2 and 3 you will encounter the concept of genre attached to particular disciplines, where in each case it will have a specific meaning, though for now we will consider it in its most general sense, replacing the French term with its closest English parallel: types. In considering literary and musical canons, we'll be asking which types of musical works, literary texts, and so on, are considered to be the major and important varieties. Does a folk-song have the same claim to musical importance as an opera? Can a horror novel sit in the literary canon alongside epic poems and drama? As with most forms of classification, genre-distinctions change over time, and so does the status of individual genres. So our approaches to texts need to be historically informed, allowing for the gradual shifts through which canons change, both in terms of the individual artworks they include and the types (i.e. 'genres') of work that are regarded as worthy of attention.

The shape of Book 1

This first book of *Voices and texts* divides into two parts, and you will encounter four different academic subjects: Religious Studies, Literature, Music and Classical Studies.

In Chapters 1 and 2 we focus on the idea of canons, beginning in Chapter 1 with Religious Studies, as we explore a canonical Buddhist text, the *Metta Sutta*. In keeping with the interdisciplinary nature of *Voices and texts*, some material on the role of music in religious ceremony is also included in Chapter 1. There are two parts to Chapter 2, the first examining the concept of canons in relation to Literature, through the example of a seventeenth-century author, John Donne, and the second looking at canons in music, with a range of examples including a musical setting of Donne's poetry.

In Chapters 3 and 4 we introduce the idea of 'remaking authority', as we analyse texts that consciously and creatively draw on literary traditions. Classical Studies is the linchpin here, with Chapter 3 exploring the way in which the work of Homer has been presented and re-presented to modern English-speaking audiences. A different classical text, Sophocles' play *Antigone*, features indirectly in Chapter 4, as we study a short South African drama, *The Island*, created during the era of apartheid.

We hope that by the time you have worked through these varied study materials, including DVD 1, and completed the assignment based on Book 1, you will have a full and rich understanding of how authority comes to be associated with particular texts and voices, and how traditions are invoked and sometimes challenged. Although the topics of Books 2 and 3 will take you in different directions again, the theme of authority remains a central concept, useful to you throughout your study of *Voices and texts.*

1 Voices of authority and truth: the *Metta Sutta*

Helen Waterhouse with Fiona Richards

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Aims

This chapter will:

- develop your knowledge and understanding of the ways in which religious texts acquire authoritative voices within specific communities through the establishment of a canon
- explore how the authority of canonical texts is invoked and demonstrated in religious practice
- introduce you to the musical aspects of chant as used in religious practice
- look at some of the problems associated with the voices of religious texts in translation.

Materials you will need

- DVD 1 (audio and video)

Introduction

We are going to begin this chapter on the voices of authority by looking at a traditional canonical text. As you have seen in the Introduction to this book, the word 'canon' was first used to describe a body of religious texts that were accepted as authentic within a tradition over a long period of time. As often happens, a word that was first used to describe a religious concept is now used much more widely, and you will explore the development of the idea of canon as the book unfolds. Here, though, we shall concentrate on a text that is part of a religious canon. Rather than base this discussion on the Bible or the Qur'an, the religious texts with which people in western cultures are perhaps most familiar, I am going to focus the discussion on a Buddhist text; an encounter with something belonging to a less familiar culture can often help us to take a fresh look at what we might otherwise take for granted or simply dismiss. We shall be looking in some detail at the story of a short Buddhist text, at the ways in which this text is used today and at some of the challenges associated with the translation of the text into new languages. To complement your study of the way in which a sacred text may be used today, the chapter includes a brief section (written by Fiona Richards) introducing you to the musical aspects of chant as used in religious practice. To begin with, however, I'll introduce, very briefly, some of the general problems associated with canonical religious texts in the modern world. You may notice as you read that the chapter does not engage with the questions of whether religious texts are true or if they merit their authoritative status. These questions, though important and legitimate, are not our focus here.

1.1 Religious texts and the modern world

Most of the religious texts (often called 'scriptures', from the Latin verb meaning 'to write') that provide a basis for religions practised today became fixed in canons many centuries ago. These texts, such as the Christian and Jewish Bibles or the Islamic Qur'an, provide a range of content including: an explanation of history; stories about the activities and sayings of founders and other important individuals; and ethical injunctions. Such texts deal with mundane matters and so can be applied to everyday life, but they are also concerned with ultimate questions such as those about the meaning of life and death. The texts offer answers to these big questions and indeed, the Christian, Jewish and Islamic traditions hold that their canonical texts are authoritative in a definitive way because they were revealed by God rather than constructed entirely by human minds.

We might expect that, down the centuries, there has been agreement about the content of the scriptural canons. However, if we take the Christian biblical canon as an example, we find that it has not been uncontested and that even now there are disagreements between, for example, Roman Catholics and Protestants about some of the biblical books. Roman Catholics include within the canon some texts, such as the Books of Tobit and Judith, and the First and Second Books of the Maccabees, that are not accepted by Protestants. Despite this, though, there is a comparatively high degree of agreement about the content of the Christian canon.

It is common outside Christianity to find that religious traditions recognise different categories of sacred writings within their canons. Some of these texts are more authoritative than others. For example, Judaism has its Bible but a vast collection of ethical and legal guidance for living also forms an integral part of the Jewish canon. This material has developed partly because revelations or the pronouncements of a religious teacher, no matter how authoritative they may be within a tradition, often need interpretation or explanation for a new time and place or in new circumstances. Some of the ethical dilemmas we face today simply did not apply when these texts were compiled. Even so, members of the communities that recognise their authority expect them to speak to people in different places and cultures and in different eras:

the texts are regarded as universally applicable. Such interpretations can become authoritative in their own right.

Before we move into the first activity for this chapter, there is a further point to note about the strategy of 'learning through activities' discussed in the Study Companion, Section 3.1. You'll find as you work through *Voices and texts* that some activities are designed to help you check whether you have understood the material you are reading while others ask you to take a more reflective attitude and to draw on your own life experience to think about the questions the material raises. In the following activity, you are asked to think about how communities who accept religious texts as authoritative might use them to address contemporary issues.

Activity

Think about a modern scientific development such as the human capacity to construct and use nuclear arms. How can religious texts authored before the development of modern science help religious communities develop a view on such contemporary issues? Spend just a few minutes on this task.

Discussion

It is clear that today's religious leaders cannot turn to sections in their canonical texts that discuss weapons of mass destruction. But they can apply the broad principles found in the texts to develop views on modern problems. Many religious texts include prohibitions against killing, for example, but they may also recognise occasions when action is better than inaction. There are plenty of other examples of issues that were simply unknown and undreamed of when the texts were collected together. This is why religious traditions have to interpret their canonical texts. It is useful to bear this in mind when you hear representatives from religious traditions speaking authoritatively in the media on modern matters.

People often think of religious traditions as discrete entities, and in popular parlance and in the media it is often implied that there is *a* Christian or *a* Hindu or *an* Islamic view of, for example, abortion or God or the afterlife. In reality, divisions within traditions may be deep-rooted and significant. There is seldom one agreed view on any issue, and internal conflict can be just as strong as common understanding. These disagreements, many of which are centuries old, often have their basis in different interpretations of canonical texts. The texts were written in particular times and places but they are expected, by the traditions that revere them, to be relevant at all times and in all places. Christians or Muslims arguing among themselves, for example about the roles that women ought or ought not to play, all cite canonical texts but co-religionists may come to different conclusions.

Texts such as the Christian Bible remain authoritative for some people in our own time because they identify with the religious traditions such texts represent. However, the Bible is not just authoritative for people who practise or 'believe in' Christianity. The ideas and stories contained within it have been influential throughout western culture. Legal systems have been based on a combination of Roman law and biblical principles of morality and justice, and allusions to biblical narrative are found in canonical works of literature throughout the western world. In these ways the Bible has been authoritative for the development and underpinning of western cultural identity regardless of choices that individuals might now make. Similar arguments can be made about the role of canonical religious texts in other cultures.

1.2 A Buddhist canonical text: the *Metta Sutta*

We now turn to look at a short example of a canonical religious text from a tradition that has its roots outside Europe. The text, called the *Metta Sutta*, comes from the Buddhist tradition. Buddhist teaching, including this text, is based on the sermons of the Buddha (the word 'Buddha' means 'the awakened one'). There is some disagreement about the Buddha's precise dates (Bechert, 1992; Cousins, 1996) but it is generally accepted that he lived in northern India in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE. Buddhists believe that the Buddha 'woke up' from ignorance and delusion when he came to an understanding (usually called enlightenment) about 'the way things really are'. His followers believe that his awakening gave him wisdom and knowledge and that the sermons he preached and the instructions for living he gave during his long life preserve that wisdom (Figure 1.1).

The Buddha was brought up with assumptions about how the world works and the place of humanity and gods within it that were very different from the Judeo-Christian tradition that underpins much of western cultural life. After the Buddha's death his teachings travelled across Asia over the course of many centuries. The countries to which they spread include China, Japan and Korea in east Asia, and Afghanistan and Uzbekistan in central Asia. Buddhism is now also increasingly evident in western countries such as North America and Europe (Waterhouse, 2001).

In contrast with the Christian Bible, which can be contained in one hand-held volume, the Buddhist canon is vast, containing many thousands of texts, some of which are very short, just a few lines, and some of which are thousands of pages long. There is much more disagreement about which texts are canonical in Buddhism than there is in Christianity. Indeed, we could say that three distinct Buddhist canons survive today (Gethin, 1998, p. 40). The three canons belong to different geographical areas: the southern tradition of Sri Lanka and south-east Asia; the eastern tradition of China, Japan and Korea; and the northern tradition of Tibet. There is much common material in the three canons but Buddhists from different areas of Asia and from contrasting schools of the tradition have their own ideas about which canonical text or texts are most important. Some texts that are highly influential in parts of Asia are rejected outright in other areas of the

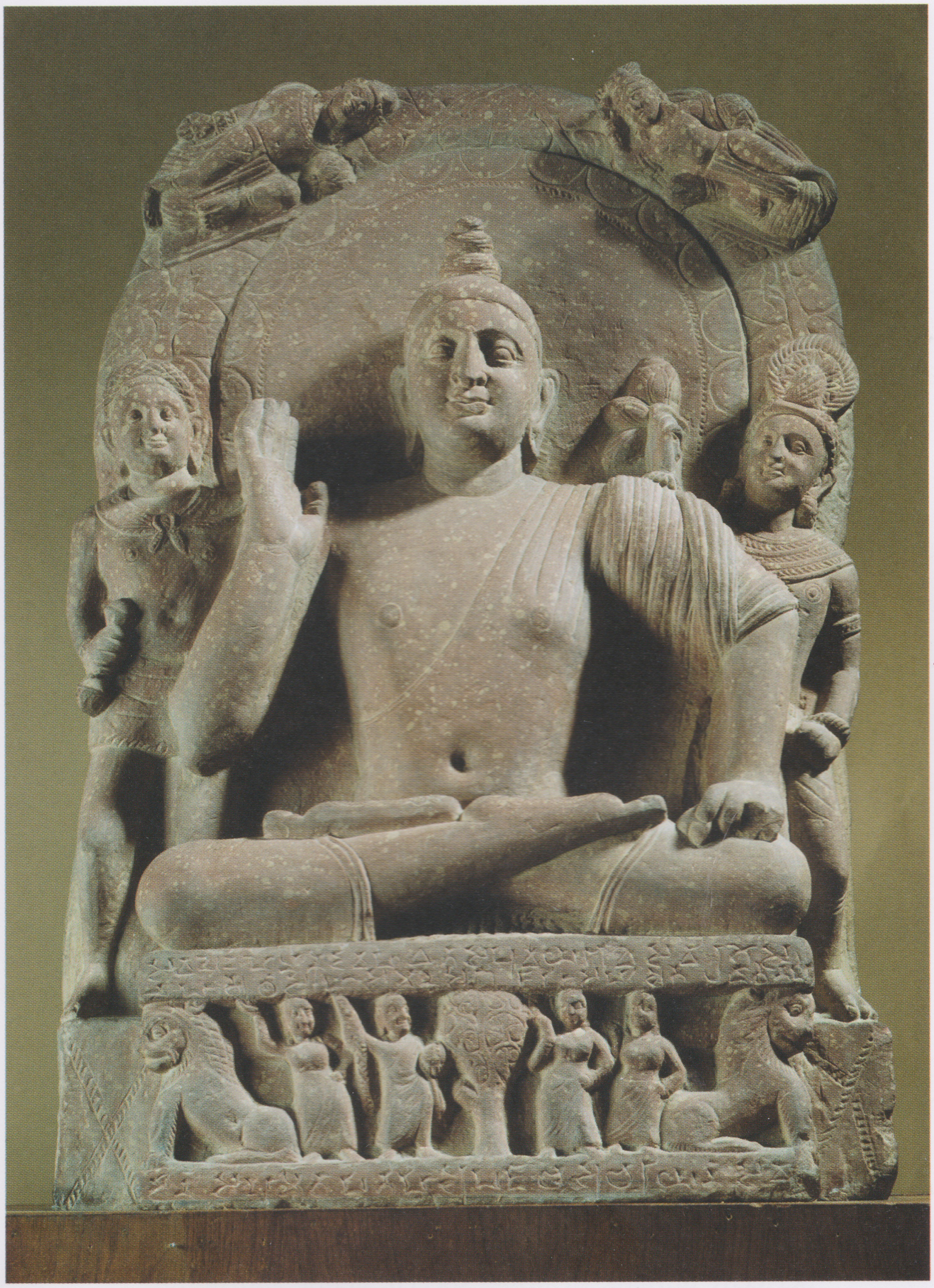

Figure 1.1 Seated buddha, first century CE, red sandstone. National Museum of New Delhi, inv. 55.25. Photographed by Angelo Hornak. Photo: © Angelo Hornak/Alamy.

Buddhist world. For example, the most important text for many east Asian Buddhists, the *Lotus Sutra*, does not feature at all in the canon recognised by the southern Buddhists of Sri Lanka, Thailand and Burma.

The *Metta Sutta* is recognised as canonical by Buddhist scholars across Asia and features in all canonical collections, but it is of particular significance for the Buddhist practitioners who live in south and south-east Asia. For these Buddhists the *Metta Sutta* is not simply part of a canon of texts; it is in regular use. In what follows I will trace the way in which the text became part of the canon and discuss how it is used. You will discover that religious texts are not simply read or studied by adherents, but are also put to work in other ways.

Translated from the **Pali** language in which it is written, the word '**sutta**' means 'thread'. It refers to a discourse or teaching said to have been given by the Buddha, which extends threadlike, connecting the Buddha to those who hear it. 'Metta' is usually translated into English, as here, as 'loving-kindness', but alternative translations are 'good-will' or 'universal love'. The *Metta Sutta* is therefore a discourse on loving-kindness that is believed to have been taught by the historical Buddha. It is difficult both to date this text and to ascribe it in a historically reliable way to an author; however, that does not prevent it from occupying a place in the Buddhist canon.

This activity should take you about 20 minutes.

Activity

1 The *Metta Sutta* is reproduced below. Read the text through a couple of times, to familiarise yourself with it.

2 The citation at the end of the text is to Saddhatissa. Why do you think the passage is ascribed to Saddhatissa if, as I've just said, Buddhists believe that the text represents the voice of the Buddha?

Metta Sutta (Loving-kindness): In praise of love and goodwill towards all beings

1 He who is skilled in welfare, who wishes to attain that calm state [**nibbana**], should act thus: he should be able, upright, perfectly upright, of noble speech, gentle and humble.

2 Contented, easily supported, with few duties, of light livelihood, with senses calmed, discreet, not impudent, not greedily attached to families.

3 He should not pursue the slightest thing for which otherwise men might censure him. May all beings be happy and secure, may their hearts be wholesome!

> 4–5 Whatever living beings there be: feeble or strong, tall, stout or medium, short, small or large, without exception; seen or unseen, those dwelling far or near, those who are born or those who are to be born, may all beings be happy!
>
> 6 Let none deceive another, nor despise any person whatsoever in any place. Let him not wish any harm to another out of anger or ill-will.
>
> 7 Just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life, even so, let him cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings.
>
> 8 Let his thoughts of boundless love pervade the whole world: above, below and across without any obstruction, without any hatred, without any enmity.
>
> 9 Whether he stands, walks, sits or lies down, as long as he is awake, he should develop this mindfulness. This they say is the noblest living here.
>
> 10 Not falling into wrong views, being virtuous and endowed with insight, by discarding attachment to sense desires, never again is he reborn.
>
> (Saddhatissa, 1994, pp. 15–16)

Discussion

1. I hope you enjoyed reading the *Metta Sutta*. This text has been in circulation for hundreds of years. Nevertheless, regardless of your attitude to religion in general or to one religion in particular, you may think there is content within it that can speak to modern people. The academic study of religion is less concerned with personal reactions to religious texts and practices, important as these reactions are, than with understanding the reactions of others.
2. The reason why the passage is ascribed to Saddhatissa has nothing to do with whether the Buddha spoke the words of the text. Instead, it makes reference to modern scholarly conventions. As you know, when you quote someone else's words, as I have done here, you must tell your reader where you took them from. The citation in brackets refers you to the full reference at the end of this chapter. The book from which this translation of the *Metta Sutta* was taken was compiled and edited by the Venerable Dr Hammalawa Saddhatissa (1914–90). Saddhatissa also made the translation of the text from Pali into English. The citation therefore refers you to where you can find this text rather than to the person who first created it. In this chapter I have referred you to English language sources and, where appropriate, to the Pali name of a text or group of texts. I have

not used the specialist scholarly system of referencing the Pali canon, which would be much less useful to you. The point of references is that academic arguments are stronger – more authoritative – if they are supported by evidence from other people's research. References also provide useful information about sources that can be checked and followed up by others.

The Buddha taught mainly within the north-west of India. He lived in a culture in which texts were transmitted orally from generation to generation. Access to the texts was controlled by elite families who would pass them on to their sons. This oral method of preserving texts may seem unreliable to us because we are used to having easy access to books and not so used to memorising large sections of poetry and prose, but it was an established system in India at that time and was probably no less reliable than copying written texts by hand. Scholars have argued in fact that the system allowed for a high degree of accuracy in transmission (Witzel, 2005).

The Buddha changed this tradition in some ways. The texts that developed from his teaching were not so tightly controlled as earlier Indian religious texts had been and they were not controlled within families, but the oral tradition persisted. Indeed, there is no evidence of writing of any kind in India in the Buddha's time (Gombrich, 1988, p. 53). According to Buddhist tradition, the disciples who heard the Buddha's teachings, including the *Metta Sutta*, remembered them and passed them on to others by word of mouth. In this way, large numbers of teachings were remembered and preserved. It was the task of monks to remember the teachings and, then as now, monks spent much of their time in study, which in Buddhist tradition entails learning texts by heart. DVD 1 contains two films that illustrate this tradition. One film shows young trainee monks reciting texts together; the other shows lay people reciting together led by a monk. We'll come back to these two films later.

Buddhist tradition records that, when the Buddha died, all the monks gathered together to recite the teachings they remembered. The gathering is known as the First Council. Tradition has it that each text unanimously agreed on by all 500 monks was accepted as part of the canon. Modern scholarship calls into question this traditional account (Prebish, 2005, p. 2035). Though we are told in other canonical texts that all the monks who had followed the Buddha were present at this meeting (Harvey, 1990, p. 73), not all monks thought the communal recitation was useful (Gethin, 1998, p. 46). It also seems likely that in fourth- or fifth-century India there were monks who did not manage to get to the venue in time to participate.

In the next activity you will read a passage from another Pali sutta, the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*. The passage is taken from a conversation between the Buddha and Ananda, one of the Buddha's closest disciples, which took place when the Buddha was close to death. The term **'dhamma'** is the Pali language version of the better-known **Sanskrit** word 'dharma'. In Buddhism, 'dhamma' is taken to mean 'the truth of how things are', and the practices that lead to knowledge and understanding of that truth. 'Discipline' refers to the way of life the Buddha recommended for his followers.

Activity

Now read the following extract. What does the Buddha say here about what would happen to his authority after his death?

> And the Lord said to Ananda: 'Ananda, it may be that you will think: "The Teacher's instruction has ceased, now we have no teacher!" It should not be seen like this, Ananda, for what I have taught and explained to you as *Dhamma* and discipline will, at my passing, be your teacher'.
>
> (Walshe, 1995, pp. 269–70)

Discussion

In this passage the Buddha explains to Ananda that after his death, when 'instruction has ceased', explanation and, indeed, authority would reside in the teachings that he had given. The Buddha did not appoint a successor, instead telling his disciples that he was leaving behind what he had taught them as the dhamma and the discipline.

The texts record that the Buddha gave his disciples guidance about how to decide whether a text was genuine. All teachings were required to have been given by the Buddha himself or by one of his most senior disciples, and any new teaching that sought admission to the canon had to conform to the already accepted teachings and rulings (Gethin, 1998, p. 47). The texts had authority because everything they contained, regardless of their 'author', appeared to be the thought and the voice of one mind (Harvey, 1990, p. 3).

Small disagreements about the authentic canon of texts arose quite soon after the Buddha's death and led to the formation of schools of Buddhism that took slightly different attitudes and developed their own canons. These disagreements usually began in relation to small points of monastic discipline rather than about significant doctrinal matters. The Pali canon is the only one of these early collections to survive. Within the tradition that preserves it, called Theravada Buddhism (meaning 'the Buddhism of the Elders'), the canon is assumed to have been settled at this very early time. Modern scholarship challenges this claim (e.g. Collins, 1990) but, within the Theravada tradition, the canon acquires part of its authoritative standing from its early date.

Remembering such a large amount of text would be a significant and very unusual feat for any individual, so before the canon was committed to writing, monks were assigned a manageable workload to memorise. A large part of a monk's job continues to be committing the texts to memory (Gombrich, 1988, p. 152), and there are regular occasions on which to recite them.

Activity

Why was it so important for the texts to be passed on to subsequent generations?

Discussion

As you have seen, before he died the Buddha told his disciples that what he had taught them represented the truth, as he had understood it. He did not appoint a successor because he said that the dhamma would be the teacher. According to the tradition, the reason why it was important to pass on the texts and indeed to maintain their accuracy, was that they were an authoritative source of the truth as the Buddha had understood and taught it.

The oral texts were first written down in Sri Lanka, in the middle or towards the end of the first century BCE (Gombrich, 1984, p. 77; Lopez, 2008, p. 9). The texts were written on dried palm leaves, which were collected together in baskets according to their content (Figure 1.2). Buddhist practitioners and scholars still refer to the Pali language canon as the 'three baskets' (**tipitaka**).

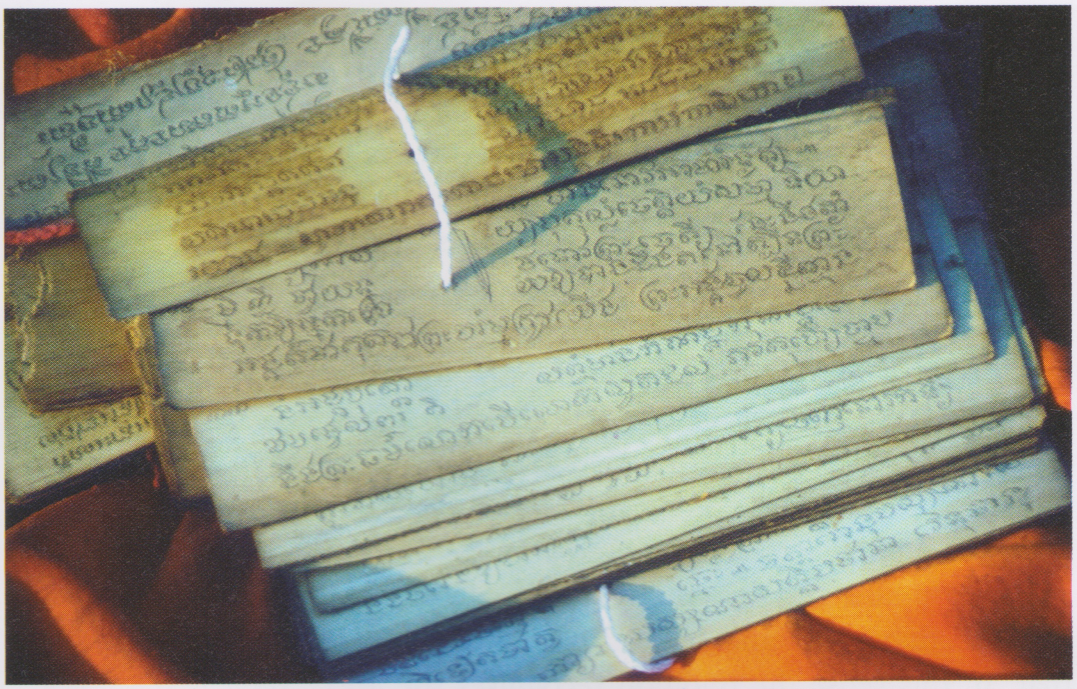

Figure 1.2 A Cambodian example of the Pali canon written on bamboo. Photo: © World Religions Photo Library/C. Stout.

The method by which the texts were collected together is clearly of scholarly interest, but for Buddhists in Sri Lanka the voice of the texts is of far more importance than the ways in which they were gathered and preserved. We could say that it is a matter of trustful confidence for Buddhists that the texts collected in the three baskets of palm leaves represent the voice of the Buddha. Of these early writings the *Metta Sutta* is probably the most widely used and popular short text (Gombrich, 1984, p. 88).

1.3 The voice of the Buddha?

Whose voice does the *Metta Sutta* represent? As with many religious canonical texts, this question is not straightforward to answer. According to Buddhist tradition, the words of the texts were spoken by the Buddha. All the texts said to have been recited at the First Council were prefaced by the words 'Thus have I heard'. In this way the monks affirmed that they had heard the Buddha (or others approved by him) speak the texts. In this sense, then, the *Metta Sutta* represents the voice of the Buddha. However, the Buddha taught that he was not revealing a new truth. The translation of the *Metta Sutta* that you have read contains cultural references to India in the fourth or fifth century BCE, but the Buddha certainly thought that what he was teaching was simply 'the way things are' and that others had the potential to understand that. In this sense the tradition recognises the *Metta Sutta* as the voice of truth or wisdom and this text, like the rest of the Buddhist canon, derives its authority from that status.

Activity

Do you think the *Metta Sutta* has authority? If you do, where do you think that authority comes from?

Discussion

You may not recognise the authority of this text at all, perhaps because you don't agree with what it says or because you can't accept that religious texts have any authority. If you do agree with some of the ideas it contains, you may think that its authority comes from the fact that it is observably true: that it is good, for example, not to despise or deceive people or to wish them harm. In that case, the fact that the text is assigned to the Buddha might seem less important to you than the fact that what it teaches is true in your experience. This view accords with Buddhist tradition, in which testing the Buddha's teaching for oneself is an important principle.

One thing that Buddhists and non-Buddhists can agree on is that the *Metta Sutta* acts as a legitimate, authoritative voice of the Buddhist tradition. Whatever we may think individually about the text, we must accept that it is an authoritative representation of the ways in which Buddhists are taught to see the world. Because that is the case, this discussion of the *Metta Sutta* as a text would be incomplete if we did not consider the ways in which Buddhists use this text. We will look at this in the next section.

1.4 Putting theory into practice

The discipline of Religious Studies has a complex history. It arose, in the 1960s, at a time when undergraduates studying religion spent most of their time working with early religious texts. Little attention was paid to the more contentious issue of the contemporary practice of religion (Cunningham, 1990, p. 21). Ancient texts are to some extent self-contained and manageable, whereas religious practice can be difficult to understand, confusing and even sometimes alarming. The early scholars of religions other than Christianity laid a good foundation for what followed, but their understanding of religion was incomplete because they avoided taking seriously the practice of religious adherents and the ways in which generations of practitioners had related to their texts. It doesn't help us to understand a religious or cultural tradition if we look only at the theory; we also need to see how the theory is put into practice.

The voice of Buddhist practice

The next three activities give you an opportunity to listen to and watch Pali chanting on DVD 1. When you have done that, we will look in more detail at the ways in which the *Metta Sutta* is used.

First, you will hear a recitation of the *Metta Sutta* in Pali by the Sri Lankan monk Mahinda Deegalle.

Activity

Now listen to Mahinda Deegalle's recitation of the *Metta Sutta* on DVD 1. What do you notice about the way Mahinda recites the sutta?

Discussion

The recitation is very regular. You can probably get a sense from the rhythm of the whole that each verse is recited separately but with similar intonation. There is no sense that Mahinda is trying to articulate the meaning of the text as he chants it. There is a degree of modulation in his voice as he recites each verse and we might discern a very basic tune, but the chanting doesn't quite make it into the category of what we commonly understand as music. The modulation would help monks to remember the text but because the degree of intonation is not great, it does not offend against the rule that monks may not listen to music.

Next, you will hear Mahinda talk about how the *Metta Sutta* is used in Sri Lanka, where he was born and brought up.

Activity

Now listen to Mahinda Deegalle's discussion of the *Metta Sutta* and how it is used on DVD 1. Can you pick out from Mahinda's description some of the ways in which the sutta is used?

Discussion

Mahinda's description gives an indication of how often the *Metta Sutta* is recited. He tells us that it is recited at home and in the temples. He also suggests that, because the sutta is about loving-kindness, it is a good focus for thoughts last thing at night, and he tells us that he was encouraged to chant it before he went to sleep when he was a small boy. This shows the status of the text; it is taught to children when they are very young and because there are many opportunities to recite it, the text stays in the memory throughout life.

Finally, you will watch Sri Lankan monks and lay people reciting texts in a temple near Colombo. They are not reciting the *Metta Sutta* but other popular Pali texts.

Activity

This activity should take you about 20 minutes.

Now watch two films on DVD 1: 'Pali suttas recited by young Sri Lankan monks' and 'Pali suttas recited by a Sri Lankan community'. What strikes you about these examples of sutta recitation?

Discussion

In 'Pali suttas recited by young Sri Lankan monks', the chanting is not as rhythmic as it might be. As you can see, these monks are mostly young and therefore comparatively inexperienced. No senior monks were present on this occasion, and the monks were reciting as much to learn the texts as for any other reason. In 'Pali suttas recited by a Sri Lankan community', the text is recited by lay people, the majority of whom would have known the texts all their lives. They are clearly very comfortable with the chanting.

Some musical aspects of Buddhist chant

Chant is common to many different south Asian cultures, which feature a wide range of chanted poetry as well as examples of chant in a variety of religious contexts. In most examples of chant the text is of primary importance.

In the film 'Pali suttas recited by young Sri Lankan monks', on DVD 1, there are only three clearly discernible different pitches (by 'pitch' we mean the way in which notes sound high or low in relation to one another). In this section one pitch assumes a much greater importance than the others. This is the first note you hear, sung clearly by the young monk, and much of the chant is based on this pitch. A second and third higher pitches, each only one step apart, are the other most commonly used musical notes, and the voices oscillate between these three sounds for much of the chant. The meditative characteristic of the chant is largely due to the drone-like qualities induced by this very limited use of melodic pitches and the mellifluous rocking between them.

If we were to notate the opening section of the chant it might look something like Figure 1.3.

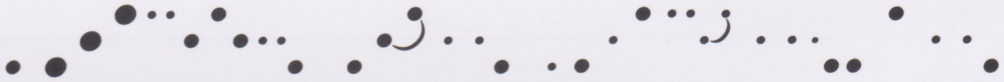

Figure 1.3 A graphic representation of Pali chant

This is a basic outline of the first 30 seconds or so of the DVD film. The lowest 'blob' is the lowest and most important pitch, the others the higher pitches. The different sizes are a rough representation of the importance of each pitch, and are intended to show you that some words are held for slightly longer, while others are chanted more quickly.

Use of the *Metta Sutta*

The uses to which the *Metta Sutta* may be put can be divided into three categories. Like many categories these three overlap but for the sake of convenience I will discuss them separately. The three are: **meditation**, teaching and protection.

Meditation

In his discussion of the *Metta Sutta*, on DVD 1, Mahinda Deegalle has more to say about meditation than about teaching and protection. He refers to the calming effect of the *Metta Sutta*: as a boy he used it to help him sleep. Calming and quietening the mind is basic to all meditation because it is not until the mind is calm that Buddhist meditators can begin meditation techniques to acquire insight and wisdom. It is not possible to think about anything in a careful way if the mind is flitting from one topic to another. The *Metta Sutta* is used to calm the mind ready for developing insight, but the text can also be a focus for insight meditation in its own right. Meditating on loving-kindness is a way to counteract hatred and to acquire a calm attitude to life in general. Indeed, reciting the *Metta Sutta* with the mind fully concentrated on its meaning is one of the most common meditation practices among Buddhists in south-east Asia (Gombrich, 1984, p. 88). Meditation, though difficult to do well because of the concentration it involves, can be a simple practice.

Activity

One of the aims of meditation is the development of good qualities. What are the qualities that the *Metta Sutta* commends?

Discussion

The *Metta Sutta* affirms many qualities, including uprightness, noble speech, gentleness, humility, contentment, calm senses, discretion, happiness, security and boundless love. The text uses the example of a mother's love for her children to suggest the kind of unconditional love that beings ought to have for each other. You may also have noticed that the text emphasises the need for loving-kindness to reach out across the world.

Teaching

As we have seen, the canon to which the *Metta Sutta* belongs represents for Buddhists the voice and the word of the Buddha. They therefore listen to that voice and try to learn from it. Until comparatively modern times the word 'Pali' meant only 'Buddhist canonical text'. The Theravada school of Buddhism, which preserved the Pali canon of which this sutta is a part, used Pali in a similar way to how ancient

Indian religions used the Sanskrit language, or the Roman Catholic Church used Latin (Gombrich, 1984, p. 78). Pali is a textual language, not a language for everyday speech, but such is the popularity of this text that Buddhists who do not know Pali understand the content of the text. Anyone who can listen to monks or lay people chanting the *Metta Sutta* and understand its content will hear a sort of sermon or exhortation (Gombrich, 1991, p. 242). They may not understand the text word for word but they will know what it expresses.

Many religious canons narrate stories about beginnings and endings, or the cycle of time, or the activities of the founders. Alongside these stories are found complex doctrinal treaties and inspirational devotional verses. The Buddhist canon is no different. Many of the texts in the Pali canon are detailed, methodical expositions of doctrine or enumerations of the rules by which monks should live. The *Metta Sutta* is more accessible than many texts and it probably gained its popularity because of that. It is also inspirational in nature and so has an ability to arouse interest in Buddhism. Although the content of the sutta is accessible to non-Buddhists, like all religious texts, it stands within a sophisticated doctrinal system. To get the maximum meaning out of the *Metta Sutta* it is necessary to understand the references within it. Although when you first read the text you may not have understood references to, for example, nibbana, people who live in Buddhist cultures are able to make these connections, so that each time the *Metta Sutta* is chanted it reaffirms Buddhist teaching for those who chant it or listen to it. Texts in other religious traditions, such as the Lord's Prayer, beginning 'Our Father, who art in heaven' for Christians, or the Shahada 'There is no God but God and Mohammad is his messenger', which is the most important declaration of faith for Muslims, have a similar teaching function. Each time these words are repeated they reinforce the ideas they contain and act as teaching texts.

Protection and prosperity

The third way in which the *Metta Sutta* is used is as a protective chant to ward off all kinds of ills and to bring about well-being. Because of its authoritative status, along with other favoured texts, it may be recited when someone dies, at the opening of Parliament, to consecrate a new building, to get a good harvest, to do well in an exam, or at a sick bed. Like adherents of other Indian religions, including Hindus and Sikhs, many Buddhists believe that sound has intrinsic power. Certain sounds, whether they convey meaning or not, are powerful because they represent truth in sound form. This is why mantras, which are believed to be made up of sacred syllables, are used extensively within Buddhism and other Indian religions. Buddhists in Sri Lanka believe that the recitation by monks of this and other suttas in chorus is highly efficacious because the practice combines the words of the Buddha with recitation by religious specialists. As they recite the texts, a thread (called a 'pirit', or 'protection' thread) may be held by the monks and by the person for whom the blessing is intended. In Figure 1.4 Buddhist monks are shown holding a pirit thread as they chant.

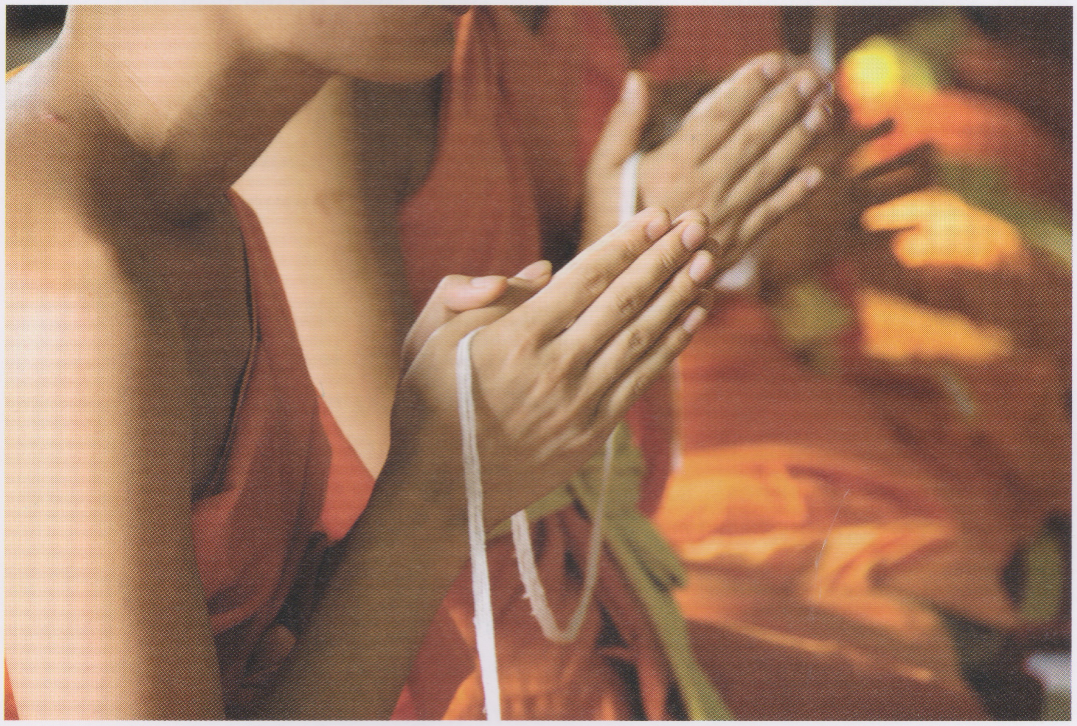

Figure 1.4 Buddhist monks chanting. Photo: © KLJ Photographic/Alamy.

The Buddhist scholar Peter Harvey (1990, pp. 180–1) puts forward five reasons for why chanting the *Metta Sutta* has a protective function.

First, chanting the *Metta Sutta*, or listening to a monk chant it, is soothing and so leads to calm because of the quality of the sound and because of the meaning of the text. Being calm is thought to be generally beneficial. It helped Mahinda sleep at night and it is good in any crisis. Sick people are more likely to recover if they stay calm, whether the root of the illness is bad **karma** or a flu bug.

Second, if hostile people hear the *Metta Sutta* being chanted they may become better disposed to the chanter and others listening; their mood will be improved and so they will feel less aggressive and be less likely to act in a hostile way. A canonical story is told about the Buddha in which an enemy, his cousin Devadatta, released a rogue elephant with the intention of killing him. The Buddha was able to subdue the elephant simply by the forceful power of his loving-kindness (Gethin, 1998, p. 26).

Third, chanting the *Metta Sutta* is simply thought to be a good thing to do. In Buddhist thought, all good actions lead in time to good results; therefore it is always worth carrying out good actions.

Fourth, the gods who are the protectors of Buddhism like to hear the *Metta Sutta* being chanted, so they may offer their protection and help when they hear it.

The final reason Harvey suggests for why reciting the *Metta Sutta* has a protective function relates to what was said above about teaching. Reaffirming virtues or good qualities in oneself is thought also to affirm and encourage those qualities.

According to the Buddhist law of karma, it is inevitable that good actions lead to good results and that bad actions lead to bad results. Buddhism certainly doesn't support the idea that a student will pass an exam just by chanting the *Metta Sutta.* Instead it teaches that misfortune, in the form of an illness, say, can come about as a result of bad karma accrued in a past life and/or from a simple infection or injury. Buddhism does not teach that chanting the *Metta Sutta* at the bedside or in other situations will bring about an immediate cure or other change of fortune. However, as you have just seen, there are reasons why Buddhists think chanting the *Metta Sutta* might help anyway.

1.5 The voice of the translator

In some ways, the translation of the *Metta Sutta* you read earlier in this chapter represents the voice of Saddhatissa, who translated it from Pali into English, as well as the voice of the Buddha and of Buddhist tradition. Saddhatissa was a Sri Lankan monk and scholar. He became a novice monk in Sri Lanka when he was twelve years old, a traditional age for boys to begin their training. As well as receiving a traditional monk's education, he also received a higher education in the west, including at London and Edinburgh universities. He spent many years at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London and continued to live as a monk while he worked there (Walshe, 1970, p. 7). As a result of this, he was able to use his knowledge and experience of Buddhism and his understanding of western culture to produce translations of Buddhist texts that he believed were both true to their original intention and accessible to native English speakers. His book was first published in 1985 and he tells us in the preface that he had taught the text to undergraduates in India and in Canada before he finalised the translation.

Saddhatissa writes: 'It should be understood that it is not a strict translation but rather a rendering of the spirit of the *suttas*' (Saddhatissa, 1994, p. vii). You can see from this comment that, rather than translate the *Metta Sutta* and other suttas word for word, he has prioritised maintaining the sense, or the 'spirit', of the text. To facilitate this, he has prepared a prose version rather than a poetic version. The text loses in this version some of the rhythmic impetus that made it easy for countless generations of Pali chanters to memorise but it probably gains in clarity because it is not constricted by metrical form. The British Pali scholar Richard F. Gombrich says of the Pali version of the text, 'content was far more important than literary grace' (1984, p. 88). He is referring to the fact that the meaning of the text is more important than its form. Of course, the fact that content is more important than form does not mean that form is unimportant.

There are many alternative translations of the *Metta Sutta*, some of which are in verse form. We'll consider one of these shortly. But first consider the questions in the following activity.

You will return to the topic of different approaches to translation in Chapter 3, when you study some extracts from the ancient Greek poem, Homer's *Iliad*.

Activity

Does the identity of the translator affect the authority of the text? If so, how does it do this and why? In thinking about this question you should draw not only on what you have just read but also on your life experience.

Discussion

I think the answer to this question is that it does. As a reader you would want to be sure that the translator had great facility with both the original language and the language you were reading. It is easy to spot a translation into English that has been made by someone who doesn't speak the language well. This kind of translation can lead, for example, to amusing signs or explanations for tourists. But it is much more difficult to spot that a translator doesn't fully understand the language and culture he or she is translating from. You would certainly want to be sure that you really were reading the text you set out to read rather than a misunderstanding of that text. Within religions there is another factor to add in. As you have seen, religious canonical texts have authority as the voice of a founder and of a tradition and even as the voice of truth. In the case of Christianity, Judaism and Islam, followers believe that their canonical texts in some sense represent the voice of God. It is obviously important for adherents of a religion that the translator hasn't made a mistake. Saddhatissa has said that he has tried to retain the 'spirit of the *suttas*'. It is therefore legitimate to ask by what authority he can decide what the spirit of the sutta is. That is why in the preface to the volume in which Saddhatissa's translation is published we are given his credentials both as a scholar and as a monk.

Here is a different translation of the *Metta Sutta*. I'll call it the 'Amaravati version'. Amaravati is the name of a Buddhist community in Buckinghamshire that published this version. This community attracts Thai follows but caters mainly for westerners, many of whom, though they have no intention of becoming monks or nuns, take their practice of Buddhism very seriously.

> This is what should be done
>   By one who is skilled in goodness,
> And who knows the path of peace:
>   Let them be able and upright,
> Straightforward and gentle in speech,
>   Humble and not conceited,

Contented and easily satisfied,
    Unburdened with duties and frugal in their ways.
Peaceful and calm and wise and skillful,
    Not proud or demanding in nature.
Let them not do the slightest thing
    That the wise would later reprove.
Wishing: In gladness and in safety,
    May all beings be at ease.
Whatever living beings there may be;
    Whether they are weak or strong, omitting none,
The great or the mighty, medium, short or small,
    The seen and the unseen,
Those living near and far away,
    Those born and to-be-born –
May all beings be at ease!
Let none deceive another,
    Or despise any being in any state.
Let none through anger or ill-will
    Wish harm upon another.
Even as a mother protects with her life
    Her child, her only child,
So with a boundless heart
    Should one cherish all living beings;
Radiating kindness over the entire world:
    Spreading upwards to the skies,
And downwards to the depths;
    Outwards and unbounded,
Freed from hatred and ill-will.
    Whether standing or walking, seated or lying down
Free from drowsiness,
    One should sustain this recollection.
This is said to be the sublime abiding.
    By not holding to fixed views,
The pure-hearted one, having clarity of vision,
    Being freed from all sense desires,
Is not born again into this world.

(Amaravati Sangha, 2009)

Activity

What strikes you about this translation?

Discussion

The most obvious difference between the Amaravati translation and Saddhatissa's translation is that the Amaravati version is in poetic form. My colleague Bill Greenwell, whose voice you will encounter in Book 2, said that what struck him when he read the Amaravati translation was that the language is slightly artificial, as if mimicking sacred texts first translated into English in previous centuries.

Certainly, the language is formal and uses idioms that we would be unlikely to use in everyday speech, such as: 'Wishing: In gladness and in safety, / May all beings be at ease'. The verse form also requires some repetition in order to maintain the rhythm, as in: 'Even as a mother protects with her life / Her child, her only child', which flows differently to Saddhatissa's 'Just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life.'

The two translations were made for different purposes. The Amaravati translators probably had in mind the fact that their version would be recited within an English-speaking community in a similar way to that of the Sri Lankan monks and lay people who were chanting Pali texts on DVD 1. Saddhatissa's translation was made largely for students and to explain the content of the text.

As with all translations, Saddhatissa and the translator of the Amaravati version have made decisions about how to express unfamiliar ideas in English. The good qualities that the *Metta Sutta* commends are relatively easy to pick out, but there are other ideas in this text that are less familiar. I am going to select two of these for further consideration.

The first comes at the end of verse 2 of Saddhatissa's translation where the text exhorts the reciter and listener not to be 'greedily attached to families'. You'll notice that there is no mention of families in the Amaravati translation. According to the preface to the sutta, the *Metta Sutta* was taught by the Buddha to a group of monks who had settled in a forest for the Indian rainy season. We know from this context that the sermon was taught to monks. Monks are full-time religious practitioners who are not permitted to earn a living. They therefore rely on others for support and were and are used to receiving alms from their families. Saddhatissa saw fit to keep the reference to families while the Amaravati translators simply refer to being not 'demanding in nature'. It may be that the Amaravati translators were more conscious than was Saddhatissa that they were addressing many more lay people than monks, and so selected words for the translation that reflected the different audience.

The second phrase is 'This they say is the noblest living here' in verse 9. The Amaravati version translates this as 'This is said to be the sublime abiding'. Gombrich prefers 'This they say is the Sublime State in this life' (Gombrich, 1984, p. 88). This is another reference to nibbana, the state in which someone lives their life without greed, hatred and delusion.

I'm not sure which of these three phrases expresses nibbana more clearly but obviously all three translators have set out to convey its meaning as best they can. It is difficult to express in a succinct way, in English, a concept that is not native to western cultures. Indeed, it is difficult to understand the meaning of a religious text at all without knowing something of the context in which it was written. That doesn't mean that when we start to study religion we cannot learn from these texts. When you first read an unfamiliar text it might seem impossible to understand – and some religious texts are much more difficult than the *Metta Sutta* to get to grips with. But the more you know about the context in which the text was written and about how the text is used and interpreted, the better you can understand it. At the same time, the texts themselves are part of the context for understanding a religious tradition. The text is hard to understand without a context and the context is hard to understand without the text. By studying both text and context, and using each to shed light on the other, you will make progress.

This is not simply an academic exercise. As Buddhism spread from India into other parts of Asia, including China, Japan and Tibet, the texts were translated into vernacular languages, the languages that people spoke in those areas. They were inevitably changed in the process, as concepts in them were expressed in terms that already carried meaning in the languages into which they were translated. In the same way, when Buddhist texts are translated into English, English words familiar from Christianity, such as 'faith' or 'god', may be used to express Buddhist concepts that don't quite match up in meaning with their Christian counterparts. Like Saddhatissa, translators have always been aware of the need to preserve the authority of sacred texts when they express them in new languages. The same process continues, as Buddhists converts and students, who think about the world in twenty-first-century English, try to understand the meaning of ancient texts. This is perhaps why religious people sometimes talk about the 'true' meaning of texts, as though there are other meanings that are 'untrue' or perhaps 'less true'.

Religious canonical texts carry a particular kind of authority. It is therefore also important to some translators that the results of their work can be understood by people who are not used to books or to sophisticated religious language. They will be especially keen to balance accuracy in translation with language that a reader can understand. You can draw your own conclusions about the accessibility of the two translations of the *Metta Sutta* that you have read in this chapter.

Conclusion

In this account of the *Metta Sutta* you have considered how the text came to be part of the Buddhist canon. You have also looked at the ways in which the text is used in Sri Lanka and at issues concerning its translation out of Pali and into other languages. Texts are important sources of authority for religious traditions. They are not the only sources of authority: tradition itself is authoritative, and so are charismatic individuals and personal experience, but texts represent continuity in religions and are cited both by traditions and by teachers.

Religious texts are also sources of cohesion and division. The *Metta Sutta* is not a source of authority for Christians, just as the Christian Bible carries no authority for Buddhists. Buddhists and Christians may appreciate each other's texts but they do not rely on them. Even within a tradition, certain texts are authoritative for some but not for others. The *Metta Sutta* is as close as it gets to a Buddhist text accepted by all Buddhists, but other Buddhist texts are not accepted by Buddhists in the same way. The same can be true of texts preserved in other religious traditions, and certainly the ways in which texts are interpreted can be a source of division.

You will have seen from this account of the *Metta Sutta* that scholarly understanding of canonical religious texts is not a simple matter of reading the texts and working out whether you agree with them or not, or what they might mean to you. Canonical texts are important to communities and they provide a focus or a context for religious teaching and for religious practice. For Buddhists it is not enough to know the content of the *Metta Sutta*; it is also important that the text is recited and put to use in approved ways. The same is true for the religious texts of other traditions. When we study religion it is important to recognise that texts have complex voices. In this case, the voices are those of the Buddha and of the tradition and practices that follow him.

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2 Canons and classics in literature and music

Sara Haslam and Fiona Richards

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Aims

This chapter will:

- examine the concept of the canon as it is used in literature and music
- develop your understanding of notions of authority when applied to different kinds of literary and musical texts
- develop your ability to analyse literary and musical texts, with examples of both poetry and prose in literature, and some standard vocal genres in music.

Materials you will need

- ‘Moving on to A150’ website
- DVD 1 (audio and video)

Introduction

You met the term 'canon' in relation to Religious Studies in Chapter 1.

This chapter is divided into two sections, Section 2.1 (written by Sara Haslam) dealing with literary texts and Section 2.2 (written by Fiona Richards) dealing with a range of vocal genres in music. Each section begins with some wide-ranging activities and examples to help you explore the concept of canons in the academic disciplines of Literature and Music. Although the meaning of the term 'canon' in these fields is related to the way it is used in Religious Studies, there are important differences, too. So in order to explore the theme of authority more widely, we shall also introduce the terms 'classic' and 'classical' which, as noted in the Introduction to this book, can be used in a variety of contexts. Then, in each section of the chapter, the focus narrows to a more extended case study. In Section 2.1 you will examine different kinds of writing by the English seventeenth-century preacher and poet John Donne. Section 2.2 also ends with a case study, slightly shorter this time, on the work of the contemporary American composer John Adams. Although these two artists may seem worlds away from each other, there is, as you will discover, a link between the two case studies that enables us to engage in an interdisciplinary study of a single text.

2.1 The literary canon

The idea of a literary canon

In Chapter 1 you learned about the idea of a canon in relation to religious or sacred texts. The first activity in this section will introduce you to the important notion of a canon in literary texts.

Activity

Read the passage below. Can you identify where it is from? How might you associate this passage with authority, as you have been exploring this term so far?

> In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.

Discussion

If you recognised the passage, you may have identified it as the first few verses of the first book of the Bible, Genesis. It relates a good deal of authoritative-sounding action, by a powerful God, in one version of the story of creation. Though the kind of authority we see exercised in the story is important, we must also consider the status, or authority, of the text itself. The ways in which a text's authority is established and then maintained (or perhaps lost) over time will be an important focus throughout this chapter.

The Book of Genesis, from which the passage quoted above is taken, possesses an authority derived from judgements made by the men (as they exclusively were) of the early church. Such authority is not unquestionable. It rarely, if ever, is that. However, this authority remains powerful enough in its modern incarnations to mean that the paragraph just quoted, or one similar to it – depending on the translation of the text – will begin any copy of the Bible in English that you consult. (The King James Bible is the version from which the passage above was taken; it is known also as the 'Authorized Version'.) As you will recall from your work on the *Metta Sutta*, the word 'canon' was first used to describe a body of religious texts accepted as authentic within a tradition over a long period of time. It was deployed by officials in the early Christian church to mean the list of books of the Bible that was accepted as 'genuine or inspired' (*OED*). Later, it came to be applied to judgements made about literature too. Scholars decide, for example, whether Shakespeare himself did write all those plays included in the 'Shakespeare canon'. Even now these experts periodically think about removing one play, or adding another, or they question his sole authorship, as they continually reassess his work. More recently still, the term 'canon' has come to designate the collection of authors who are to be recognised (and therefore read, and probably taught in schools and universities) as 'major'. The works of these canonical authors – or at least their most important works – are in turn designated 'classics'.

Such distinctions (as to 'classic' status, for example) are, in fact, experienced as part of a reader's life from an early stage. There is a close relationship between the literary canon and any syllabus found in schools. The formal 'Key Stage' reading lists for children as young as six or seven now distinguish between examples of 'modern fiction' and 'classics'. Children find Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1837–9), say, or C.S. Lewis's Narnia chronicles (1950–6), described as 'classics', while Rosemary Sutcliff's *Eagle of the Ninth* (1954) is an example of 'modern fiction' instead. In these cases, decisions are being made that confer what might be described as a kind of perpetual authority on specific texts (though, as we shall see, this authority is not always as 'perpetual' as it seems). In turn, they are very likely to influence the reading choices of a large proportion of the UK's children at any one time. This is one important way in which notions of the canon are maintained.

Canon formation

Even if you have never come across the term 'canon' before in relation to literary texts, you will know something about how canons might be formed, perhaps as a result of your own education. The following activity will test this, and also help you to think more about canon formation.

Activity

This activity should take you about 20 minutes.

Imagine you have met someone who is interested in learning about literature in English, but who has read very little. Consult the list below of titles of assorted drama and prose texts. Assume a temporary mantle of authority (be bold for now – you will have an opportunity to reflect on your choices afterwards) and divide them into two columns for the benefit of your new friend. One column should be headed 'Not to be missed', the other 'Can be missed'. Don't worry if some of the names or titles on the list are unfamiliar; if you need a third column, headed 'Undecided', that's fine too.

Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719)
D.H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1960)
William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* (*c*.1595)
Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902)
Albert Camus, *The Outsider* (1942)
Ursula le Guin, *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968)
Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus* (1604/1616)
Robert Louis Stevenson, *Treasure Island* (1883)
Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (1861)
Graham Greene, *The End of the Affair* (1951)
Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811)
Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (1955)
Angela Carter, *The Magic Toyshop* (1967)
Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (1847)
Norman Mailer, *The Fight* (1974)
Katie Price, *Being Jordan: My Autobiography* (2004)
Sophocles, *Antigone* (*c*.440 BCE)
John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678/1684)

Discussion

Your individually constructed list of texts that are 'Not to be missed' will be invested with little of the kind of authority we have been discussing so far. It must therefore be distinguished from a canon that has the weight of public scholarship or of an education authority behind it – though some of your titles, as I said above, may well have been encountered as part of your own formal education, and are likely to be replicated on a canonical list compiled by any authority one can name. Your list was also limited, however, in three key ways. First, you were restricted to those titles listed here. (Although you may have thought of others you wanted to add.) Second, in line with the needs of your friend, you had to make your choices from books available in English. 'Classics' are, of course, found in many languages, and two of the titles here relate to translations. Third, if you haven't read all the texts on the list, you will be basing your decisions on opinions other than your own – how authoritative these other opinions are might be something you'd like to think about further. Some texts are almost certain to have been included in your 'Not to be missed' list. Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* is one example, as is Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* – and there has never been any doubt as to this play's author, by the way. *Pilgrim's Progress*, if you added that, used to be one of the few books, aside from the Bible, that you could guarantee people would have read: it retains its canonical status in English Literature, though is less widely read now. More interesting, however, are the decisions you made about what to place on your 'can be missed' list, and why. There are some potentially rich topics for discussion here. You may have decided that texts translated into English (such as Camus' *The Outsider – L'Etranger*) didn't make the selection, or books about sport (Mailer's *The Fight*), or detective fiction (Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*). The book written explicitly for children (*Treasure Island*) might well have been excluded on exactly these grounds; though it achieved vast popularity, even Stevenson himself was rather embarrassed by the text that made his name.

In certain circumstances, similar arguments will have undoubtedly taken place among opinion makers – teachers and scholars, as already suggested, but also publishers, critics and reviewers – about the canonical status of these texts, or texts like them. The outcome, however, is in many cases curiously unpredictable, and, crucially, is highly dependent on those 'certain circumstances', or on what is more precisely called 'context'. The important thing to note, in fact, is the literary canon's openness to change and to challenge, especially when compared with the more closed nature of the biblical canon (though you may find it interesting to look up the word 'apocrypha' in a dictionary in relation to this point). The literary canon can occasionally be seen to shrink. Though John Masefield was made Poet Laureate in 1930, his reputation fell sharply soon afterwards. It recovered, to a degree, but it would be unusual to find his work on a core English Literature course now. More often, the canon grows. Despite my acknowledgement that Conan Doyle's detective story *The Hound of the Baskervilles* might justifiably have been on your 'can be missed' list, there are now whole shelves of contemporary academic scholarship, as well as university courses, devoted to genre fiction (meaning different types of fiction), including detective fiction, children's literature or science fiction. It is no longer unusual to take such works seriously, to think about them, and accord them a status similar to those works whose route to canonical authority was more direct. Times have changed for genre fiction.

The *Oxford Companion to English Literature* is a standard reference work. It features dictionary-like entries describing authors, texts, literary movements and critics. The flyleaf of the 1989 edition (Drabble, 1989) illustrates the ways in which such a work both supports the notion of, and forms a contribution to the debate about, 'the canon'. '[Margaret Drabble] has widened the *Companion*'s appeal', runs the blurb on the flyleaf, 'by admitting to the canon topics once thought to be beyond the pale of literary respectability'. One of its most interesting entries, from the perspective of a history of the canon, relates to the journey into the public sphere of D.H. Lawrence's novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, initially thought to be unprintable, but now found on many courses in English Literature around the world. An expurgated (or 'purified') version of Lawrence's book was published in 1932 (it was first published privately in 1928). Penguin decided to publish the full version, with its sex scenes and its four-letter words, in 1960, and was promptly prosecuted under the Obscene Publications Act 1959. The trial became a celebrated cause of the day and, thanks in no small degree to various prominent authors who appeared as witnesses for the defence, Penguin was acquitted. A second edition was published by Penguin in 1961. This example from UK publishing history illustrates how far judgements about texts must be seen as rooted in a particular time and place. Despite the longevity of some canonical certainties, such as Austen's novels (her novels and Shakespeare's plays are among those texts that are as close to canonical certainties as it is possible to get), the example of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* also illustrates how in literature notions of classic and canonical status can change – along with ideas about politics, or sex, or anything else on which writers may choose to focus.

Though the involvement of the English legal system complicates the issue, it is still true to say that much of the opposition to Lawrence's book, as well as its support, might have been categorised as 'social opinion'. One eminent scholar, Richard Hoggart (who went to court in Penguin's defence), begins his introduction to the 1961 edition by saying '*Lady Chatterley's Lover* is *not* a dirty book. It is clean and serious and beautiful'. Despite Hoggart's position – and thus his authority – in the field of English Literature, it is not impossible to imagine another eminent figure in society stating the opposite. Simple 'opinion', however, can sometimes be the first building block for canon formation. In the case of literature, if enough authoritative figures come to think a particular author or work is great, and say so persuasively in books or on television or in lecture halls, then children in school or students at university may well soon find themselves studying that author or text as a foundational part of their Literature course. Good opinion leads to the quest for further knowledge and interpretation, both necessary aspects of the 'industry' of the canon. Scholars, like those I have mentioned, painstakingly produce a body of work on the relatively new field. We can trace this process in motion by considering the English poet John Donne (*c.*1572–1631).

Case study: John Donne

You can read a discussion of Donne's poem 'The Flea' on the 'Moving on to A150' website.

John Donne (Figure 2.1) was not only a poet. He ended his career as Dean of St Paul's Cathedral in London, though he was, in fact, born a Catholic in 1572. His role at St Paul's meant that he spoke with great authority as a churchman. Interestingly, as we shall explore in this section, this manifestation of Donne's authority did not coincide with his poetical works finding their way into the literary canon. There are, however, clear relationships between the ways he achieved his effects as a preacher and as a poet. In what follows we are going to explore three different kinds of writing that Donne produced, and then think about the ways they might be used to develop our understanding both of the canon and of the notions of authority associated with it.

This activity should take you about 25 minutes.

Activity

First, read the poem 'The Good Morrow' (on p. 50), making a note of anything about it that especially strikes you. This may be a particular word or idea. Then read it aloud to yourself, again noting anything that is emphasised by this way of experiencing the poem. Which words can you hear rhyming with each other, for example? Finally, listen to the poem being read aloud on DVD 1.

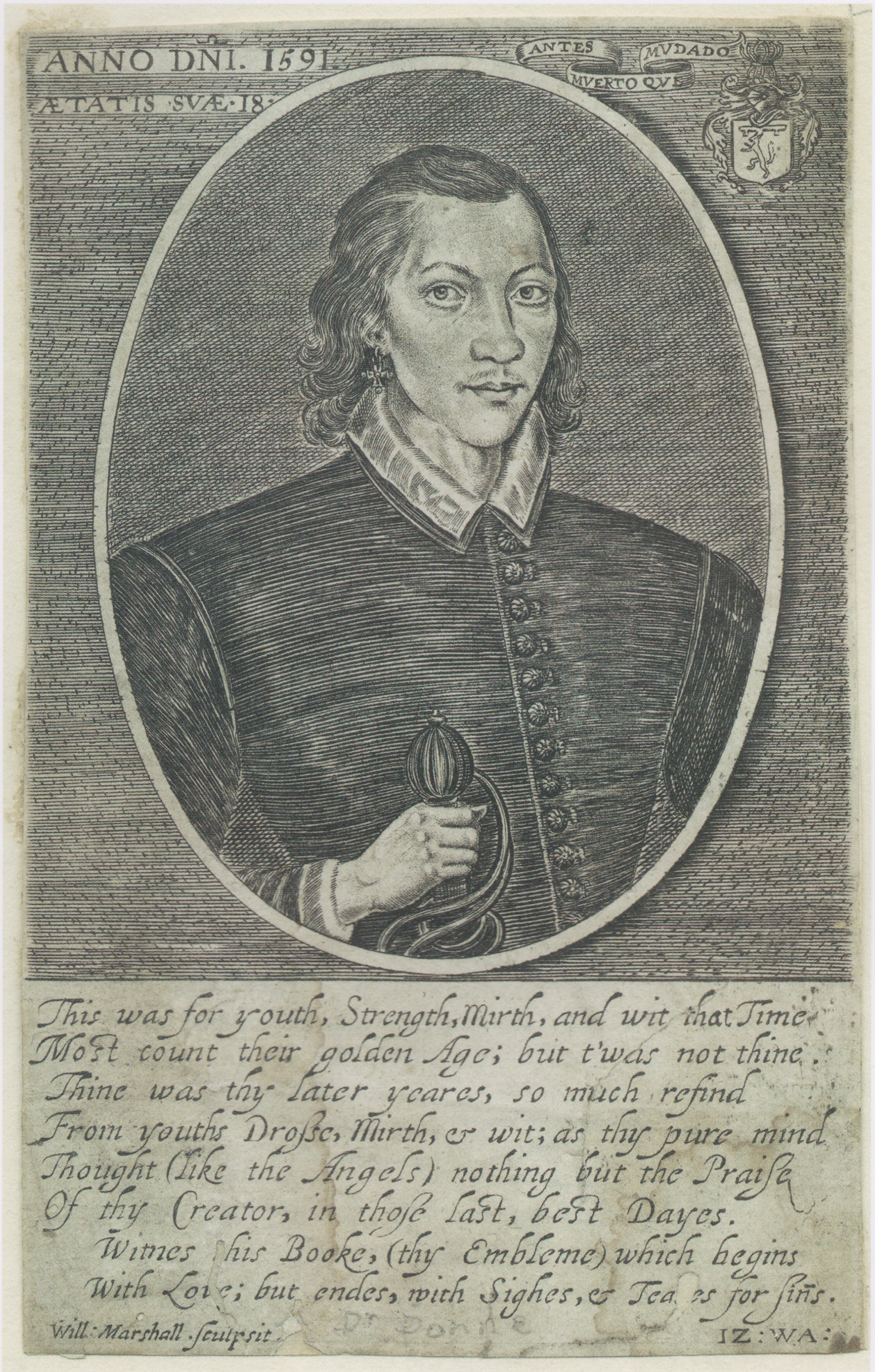
ANNO DNI. 1591.
ÆTATIS SVÆ. 18.
ANTES
MVDADO
MVERTO QVE
This was for youth, Strength, Mirth, and wit that Time
Moſt count their golden Age; but t'was not thine.
Thine was thy later yeares, so much refind
From youths Droſſe, Mirth, & wit; as thy pure mind
Thought (like the Angels) nothing but the Praiſe
Of thy Creator, in thoſe laſt, beſt Dayes.
Witnes his Booke, (thy Embleme) which begins
With Love; but endes, with Sighes, & Teares for ſins.
Will: Marshall. ſculpsit.
IZ: WA:

Figure 2.1 William Marshall, 'Frontispiece portrait of John Donne', line engraving, 12 × 8 cm, from John Donne (1635) *Poems*. Photo: © National Portrait Gallery, London.

The Good Morrow

I wonder by my troth, what thou, and I
Did, till we loved? were we not weaned till then,
But sucked on country pleasures, childishly?
Or snorted we in the seven sleepers' den?
'Twas so; but this, all pleasures fancies be.
If any beauty I did see,
Which I desired, and got, 'twas but a dream of thee.

And now good morrow to our waking souls,
Which watch not one another out of fear;
For love, all love of other sights controls,
And makes one little room, an every where.
Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,
Let maps to others, worlds on worlds have shown,
Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one.

My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,
And true plain hearts do in the faces rest,
Where can we find two better hemispheres
Without sharp north, without declining west?
What ever dies, was not mixed equally;
If our two loves be one, or, thou and I
Love so alike, that none do slacken, none can die.

(Smith, 1980, p. 60)

Discussion

You may have noted down a few different aspects of this poem. Perhaps you focused on some of the words that rhyme, or a difficult word or two. For me, it is the initial question that stands out. The commas throughout break up the lines, preventing a smooth flow and helping to create the sense of an intimate conversational exchange.

Now you have read the poem, and listened to it, I will explain a few of the references that might be unfamiliar to modern readers. Lines 2 and 3 might be making a point about the lovers' maturity in their passion by referring to the practice, common in Donne's day, whereby the infants of rich families were wet-nursed in the country. Some critics see (or more precisely, hear) a sexual reference instead in 'country pleasures'. The 'seven sleepers', in line 4, refers to the story of seven Christian youths, who were persecuted by the Roman emperor Decius (249 CE) and walled up alive in a cave, whereupon they slept miraculously for

187 years. Line 19 refers to the contemporary idea that disease and death were the result of a disproportion in a person's constituent elements.

Activity

This activity should take you about 15 minutes.

After reading the poem aloud to yourself again, ask yourself the following questions about the form of the poem:

1. How are the poem's lines grouped?
2. Which lines rhyme with each other?
3. What is the effect of the rhyme?

Discussion

1. The lines are arranged in three stanzas (the technical term for a grouping of lines of verse), with seven lines in each.
2. We might expect poems to rhyme, and this one does (though as you will know it is not always the case). There is also a regular **rhyme scheme** – this is the phrase used to describe the pattern to the rhyme in a particular stanza or poem. The first and third lines of each stanza rhyme, as do the second and fourth, and then the last three lines all rhyme. This rhyme scheme could be indicated as follows: ABABCCC.
3. The rhymes are what help to move the poem forward with energy, and, for this reader at least, they contribute to the pleasure of reading it. Is this true for you? In this particular poem the rhymes are sometimes more, and sometimes less, strongly felt. The consecutive rhymes in the last three lines in each stanza (these are 'cleanest' in the first stanza – read it again to see what I mean) emphasise the closure of the stanza and each final idea: the other's beauty; their love; the permanence of their love.

It is possible that in one of your readings of Donne's poem you thought about the time of day at which it is set. The poem is an 'aubade' – which means that the scene it describes takes place at dawn. The title helps to illustrate this fact, but also refers to the central metaphor of the poem, which is the awakening to a new life of love, a union of body and soul. Hold this idea in mind as you complete the next activity, in which the form of the poem is related to the ways we read and respond to it.

This activity should take you about 15 minutes.

Activity

Now answer these further questions about the poem:

1 What is the effect of opening the poem with a question, and to whom is the question addressed?

2 Which words stand out?

3 When the poem is read aloud, what impact do all the commas have? Listen again to the poem if you wish.

Discussion

1 The opening question, addressed by the 'I' in the poem to his lover, might have the effect of making any other reader feel excluded from, or uninterested in, the poem. It focuses the reader's attention on their union above all else. It could be described as either a risky or a very confident strategy.

2 For me, the words that stand out on a further reading are the variations of 'I', making me wonder, in fact, how far the poem *is* about Donne's union with his lover, and how far it is more self-reflective, or self-referential, instead. He answers his own questions in line 5 after all! But I am also struck by the references to exploration ('sea-discoverers') and the way in which he grandly appropriates contemporary ideas and cultural themes in the description of his private and personal experience – in line 11, for example, Donne is drawing on the idea that God can be described as a circle whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.

3 When the poem is read aloud, the commas in certain lines seem to slow it down (as I said above), by interrupting the flow. In lines 1 and 2, for example, or in the last lines of stanzas 2 and 3, the poem reads more like everyday conversation (an effect also established by that opening question) than regular rhythmic poetry. Perhaps you found that these parts of the poem were the ones you responded to less positively than others.

'The Good Morrow' is now a well-known poem, commonly studied on English Literature courses. Our second example of Donne's writing is prose rather than poetry, and is very different from the poem you have just read. This difference is one reason why I have chosen Donne for the case study in this section, and it will help you to think about the varied nature of the authority that has been attached to this writer since the time his work was first published.

Activity

This activity should take you about 20 minutes.

Read the following passage. As you read, think about what kind of prose it might be. Donne is constructing an argument (or making a case on a particular theme). Try to identify some of his points.

> Almost every man hath his appetite and his taste disposed to some kind of meats rather than others: he knows what dish he would choose for his first and for his second course. We have often the same disposition in our spiritual diet. A man may have a particular love towards such or such a book of Scripture; and in such an affection I acknowledge that my spiritual appetite carries me still upon the Psalms of David for a first course, for the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and upon the Epistles of St Paul for a second course, for the New. And my meditations, even for these public exercises to God's Church, return oftenest to these two. For as a hearty entertainer offers to others the meat which he loves best himself, so do I oftenest present to God's people in these congregations the meditations which I feed upon at home in those two Scriptures.
>
> If a man be asked a reason why he loves one meat better than another where all are equally good (as the books of Scripture are), he will at least find a reason in some good example, that he sees some man of good taste, and temperate withal, so do. And for my diet I have St Augustine's protestation that he loved the Books of Psalms, and St Chrysostom's that he loved St Paul's Epistles, with a particular devotion. I may have another more particular reason, because they are Scriptures written in such forms as I have been most accustomed to, St Paul's being letters, and David's being poems.
>
> For God gives us not only that which is merely necessary, but that which is convenient too. He does not only feed us, but feed us with marrow and with fatness. He gives us our instruction in cheerful forms.
>
> (Scott, 1997, p. 91)

Discussion

This passage is taken from a sermon, as is clear from the references to 'these public exercises' and 'God's people in these congregations'. Donne chooses to support his argument with examples from his own experience. His argument is about reading the Bible, and how individuals form relationships with particular, and varied, texts. Donne's main point is that the spiritual 'diet' that is provided in this way by God is both palatable and wide-ranging, and should feel less like hard work because of this combination.

You can listen to the passage being read aloud on DVD 1 ('John Donne: sermon').

In addition to his poetry and his preaching, Donne also found time to write in other forms, and examples of his essays are still regularly published. The next example of his writing is taken from an essay (here meaning simply a short piece of prose on a particular subject), written after a serious bout of illness in 1623.

This activity should take you about 10 minutes.

Activity

Read the following passage. Then listen to the passage being read aloud on DVD 1 ('John Donne: essay'), in both cases thinking about whether any of the words or phrases are at all familiar, or whether you have come across them in another context.

> No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were. Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind. And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls: it tolls for thee.
>
> (Scott, 1997, p. 75)

Discussion

For all that Donne is now best known as a poet, this passage contains some of his most famous words: 'never send to know for whom the bell tolls: it tolls for thee'. The American writer Ernest Hemingway chose the title *For Whom the Bell Tolls* for a novel that he published in 1940, but it is possible you have come across it in a number of other contexts. The opening phrase, 'No man is an island', is also well known, and is quoted widely.

Each of these three very different types of writing by Donne (poem, sermon, essay), as well as offering interest and pleasure on reading, might usefully develop your understanding both of the canon and of the notions of authority associated with it.

The publication history of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, which you read about earlier in this section, shows that the canonical status of a literary text is highly dependent on context and is subject to challenge and change. The authority and degree of influence of a canonical text also depends on context. Of the three texts by Donne you have looked at, one type of writing may well be more successful than another at influencing a particular reader or listener at a particular time and place. To enable you to assess how authority came to be associated with these particular texts, here is some more information about each of them.

'The Good Morrow' probably dates from 1602. In his lifetime, Donne was hardly known for his passionate and erotic poems, which were collectively called the *Songs and Sonnets.* These poems, including 'The Good Morrow', were in fact not published until after his death (only the two 'Anniversaries' were published in his lifetime); instead, handwritten copies were circulated freely among his friends and acquaintances. He died in 1631, and the first collected edition of his poetry appeared in 1633. The poems were not printed from Donne's own drafts, and 'To His Mistress Going to Bed' was omitted from this edition because of its indecency. The same edition notably included an elegy to Donne, by the poet Thomas Carew, in which his establishment and religious credentials were also made prominent (the poem was titled 'An Elegie upon the Death of the Deane of [St] Pauls, Dr John Donne'), perhaps in an attempt to overshadow the undeniably sexual nature of much of the verse. Though Donne did have contemporary admirers of his poetry, the eighteenth century produced some stern critics. Donne's reputation dwindled, and it is very unlikely that Donne would have been called 'the most electrifying poet in the English language' by the popular modern historian Simon Schama (2009) were it not for the labours of one particular man. T.S. Eliot (1888–1965) was one of the most significant poets and critics of the twentieth century, author of such classics (and I use the word advisedly!) as 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' (1915) and *The Waste Land* (1922). Eliot's high opinion of Donne led directly to his poetry achieving eminence in the later twentieth century. The focus in this twentieth-century 'revival' was on Donne's 'metaphysical poetry'. The term is a way of describing his kind of highly wrought, concentrated, imagistic and original verse – and had been used by Donne's critics as a term of disparagement in the two previous centuries.

The sermon was delivered in 1618 at Lincoln's Inn, in London. This was before Donne had been promoted to the Deanship of St Paul's Cathedral, but he had already preached before Queen Anne on more than one occasion. Sermons were a powerful communicative tool, even for less successful and gifted churchmen than Donne: the time at which he lived has been called by one editor of his prose 'sermon-mad' (Scott, 1997, p. xx). Huge, and socially diverse, congregations came to watch Donne's open-air performances, and he held them 'enthralled, unwearied, unsatiated' with his charismatic preaching (Scott, 1997, p. xix). Donne and his contemporaries may well have expected his sermons to survive; Donne left them carefully written out so that his son might publish them. However, one nineteenth-century Dean of St Paul's accused his sermons of 'teeming with laboured obscurity', and so opinions have been divided to a degree about this aspect of Donne's career (Scott, 1997, p. xix).

Donne was seriously ill in 1623. He thought it likely he would die. In 1624 he published a series of religious meditations, or reflections, on his illness, and the essay quotation is taken from 'Meditation 17: Now, this bell tolling softly for another says to me, Thou must die' (Figure 2.2). This example is the deeply personal but powerful expression of a man who has been close to death, yet who feels a renewed desire to influence the minds of those who might read him, wanting to communicate an important point about mortality and responsibility as a result of his experience.

Before we conclude this section with a reading of the final poem by Donne, we are going to consider each of the examples of his writing that we have already read one more time, in the light of the new information I have given you above.

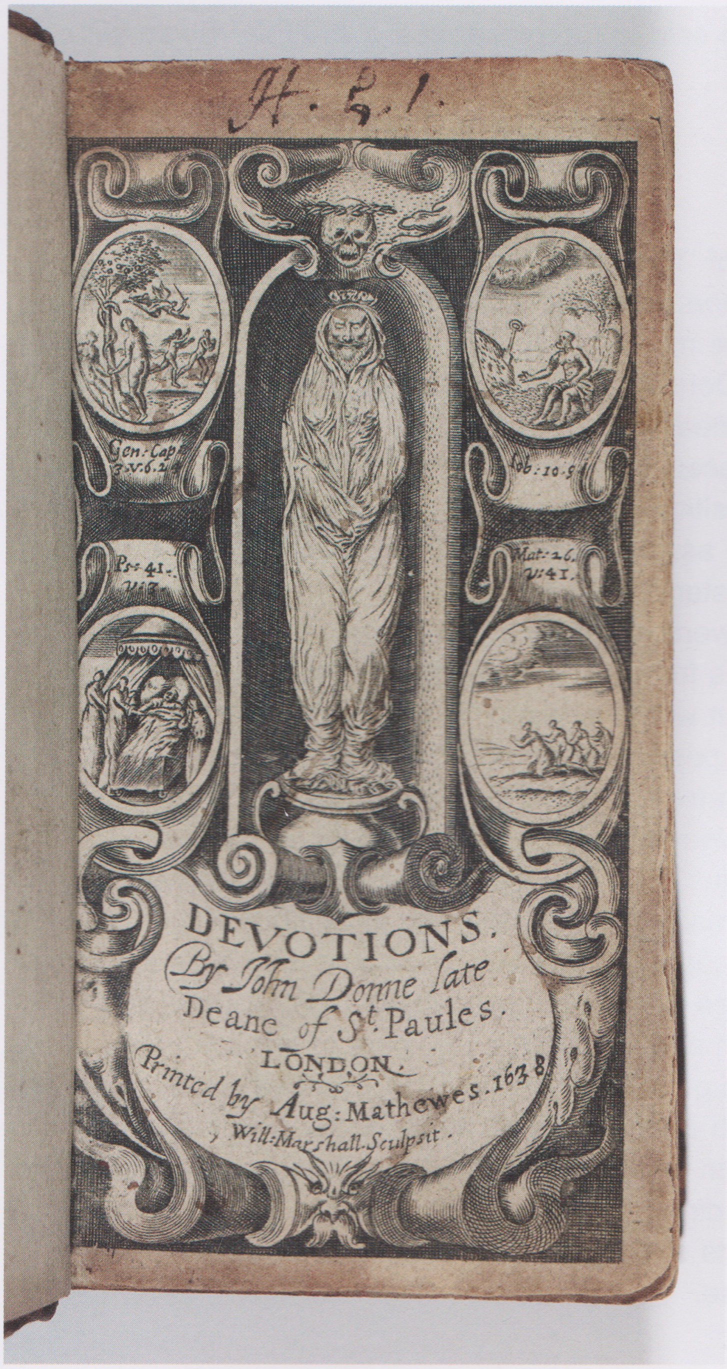
H.2.1.
Gen: Cap 3. v.6.2
Job:10.9
Ps: 41. v:3
Mat: 26. v:41.
DEVOTIONS.
By John Donne late
Deane of St. Paules.
LONDON.
Printed by Aug: Mathewes. 1638
Will: Marshall Sculpsit.

Figure 2.2 Unknown engraver 'Frontispiece', engraving from John Donne (1638) edition of the *Devotions*, London. Cambridge University Library, Keynes.B.4.33. © Cambridge University Library. Donne is portrayed in his funeral shroud, as he was for his famous marble effigy by Nicholas Stone in the Deanery of St Paul's, 1635.

Activity

This activity should take you about 30 minutes.

Reread 'The Good Morrow' and the extracts from Donne's sermon and essay, and make some notes answering the following questions. In what ways has authority come to be associated with each of them, and can their canonical status be said to have changed over time? Begin with 'The Good Morrow'.

Discussion

'The Good Morrow'

The publication history of 'The Good Morrow' provides a useful example of both opinion, and canon, formation – and your notes could have drawn out the links between the model of canon formation we discussed earlier, and what happened to Donne. The process of 'canonisation', which by its very nature is rarely immediate, was in this case an unusually long and drawn-out one, partly because of the tensions between the kind of poetry he produced and his position in the established church. But during Donne's lifetime opinion as to his poetry was necessarily limited because of its highly informal existence and circulation. Even when the poems appeared in 1633 they were relatively unauthoritative – they stood at several editorial removes from the original copies. As one result of this, scholars still argue about which versions of his poems are the 'right' ones. (An edition of the poem published in 2008, for example, reproduced a different version of lines two and three of 'The Good Morrow': 'were we not weaned til then, / But sucked on childish pleasures sillily?'; Robbins, 2008, p. 197.) In addition, in deference to public taste certain poems were omitted from the edition of 1633; ranged alongside those that did appear, in a way that could only draw attention to the tensions mentioned above, came an elegy lauding Donne's public position as a churchman and establishment figure in the last years of his life as well as his poetic gifts. It wasn't until the twentieth century, as you will have noted, that with Eliot as its champion, there was a new reclamation and elevation of Donne's poetry, this time a more complete one. One might trace a direct correlation between the involvement of one of the most famous poets of the twentieth century and the heights to which Donne's fame rose.

The sermon

Once you know that this is an extract from a sermon to what was probably a large, socially and politically powerful, highly attentive congregation, the ways in which this text might be linked with authority are plain. In addition, Donne had closely considered the life of his words after his death, and how they could continue to influence those who read them. As you may also have pointed out, Donne's subject is the Bible, so he returns our focus to the notion of biblical, perhaps canonical, authority, but as he does so he takes great care to establish his significant credentials as a reader and communicator via those he counts as his own teachers – hugely influential figures such as St Augustine (354–430). (The poem is replete with references to classical and theological thought too.) There was clearly a strong performance element to Donne's preaching, which aided the authority of his words, and helped him to communicate his message effectively. Another part of the reason he was so successful, I would suggest, is his simultaneous adoption of earthy, everyday imagery: the focus on food. His sheer love of the words features too, in the important acknowledgement of his poetic heritage: 'they are Scriptures written in such forms as I have been most accustomed to […] David's being poems'. Even this combination of skills and various types of authority is not powerful enough, however, to mean that it is his sermons rather than his poems for which Donne is now known. This might tell us more about modern genre boundaries (students of Literature are increasingly unlikely to have sermons included in their required reading) than it does about their intrinsic qualities – unappreciated by some in the nineteenth century, as you saw. Or it may, rather, be due to the many and various cultural and political developments between his time, 'sermon-mad' as it was, and the present day. Finally, it may also simply be that Eliot, for related cultural reasons, did not concentrate his proselytising attention on Donne's sermons.

The essay

The final sample from Donne's writing provides a good example of the ways in which authors of literary texts might seek to establish a particular authority by association. As I pointed out earlier, Hemingway titled a novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in 1940. If you knew the line, but knew nothing else about the author, this extract also has another function. It illustrates how the words of a writer who is in other ways obscure to us may be lodged in our consciousness all the same, via a line of such beauty, effectiveness or simplicity that it transcends the remit of any canonical authority.

In this activity you have thought about the ways in which different kinds of literary texts might be associated, or invested, with authority by those who read or listen to them. In Donne's case, this has been seen to change according to context. The authority accorded to him as a preacher and writer of sermons was more contemporary. His influence as a poet is more recent. As an essay writer his influence is more evenly balanced. You also related your discoveries about Donne's writing to the idea of the literary canon. Despite their slow route to success, Donne's poems now speak with an authority derived from his established position in that canon. (And he is, by the way, particularly known for the 'dramatic authority' of his poetic voice: look again at how energetically the word 'I' wraps up that first line before it dips into the question. The unique and exclusive relationship with the beloved is mapped, too, onto the contemporary cultural experience of geographical exploration and conquest. For all the talk of harmony and balance, 'possession' and control are also an important part of the poem.) Scholars are still busily occupied in the twenty-first century, using their knowledge of Donne to (re)construct and maintain his reputation in this field.

One of the issues that those opinion makers return to in Donne's work is his ability to use both religious and secular imagery, or to use imagery that can be read in either way. Why should this be? We have heard the age Donne lived in described as 'sermon-mad', but there are more personal issues to be considered here too. The critic John Carey writes that Donne 'lost an irreplaceable absolute' when he renounced Catholicism, and argues that much of his work bears testimony to the resultant crisis (Carey, 1981, p. 30). Donne's poetic quests for a renewed relationship with God do often sound like emotional and psychological battles with a lover instead, or as well, with the result that his poems can often read as though they are simultaneously sacred and secular. His religious poems provide some of the clearest illustrations of this point. Such cross-fertilisation has a notable impact on Donne's authority – depending for its precise effect on the nature of his audience, of course. His agonised passions are driven by more than one kind of religious, emotional or sexual need, or loss. Similarly, his tormented relationship with God can also ring true in a secular sense.

Though Donne's writing is not always agonised, the passionate poem is most indicative of his temperament and style. The poem you are about to read is also an example of a sonnet, a popular poetic form that you will meet again in the next chapter of this book.

The sonnet

A sonnet is a poem usually consisting of fourteen lines linked by a regular rhythm and one of two major rhyme schemes. The Italian, or 'Petrarchan', sonnet falls into two parts. The first eight lines are called the 'octave', comprising two **quatrains**, which rhyme ABBAABBA, and the last six lines, called the 'sestet', usually rhyme CDECDE or CDCDCD. In the English, or 'Shakespearean', sonnet there are three quatrains rhyming ABABCDCDEFEF, with a concluding rhyming couplet, GG. Traditionally, the sonnet includes a distinctive change of mood or thought, either after the octave, or at the start of the closing couplet. This is called the 'turn'. Sexual love was the standard subject of the sonnet, which was introduced to

English in the sixteenth century. In the seventeenth century, writers including John Donne and John Milton expanded the range of the sonnet to other matters, including those of religious and political concern.

Activity

This activity should take you about 20 minutes.

Read the poem below, then read it aloud, and finally listen to it on DVD 1 ('John Donne: Batter my heart'). Try to identify the characteristics that make this poem a sonnet. What do you notice about Donne's use of language? Look in particular at the **alliteration** – that is, the way in which Donne emphasises particular words by repeating the same initial sound.

Batter my heart, three-personed God; for, you
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
Your force, to break, blow, burn, and make me new.
I, like an usurped town, to another due,
Labour to admit you, but oh, to no end,
Reason your viceroy in me, me should defend,
But is captived, and proves weak or untrue,
Yet dearly I love you, and would be loved fain,
But am betrothed unto your enemy,
Divorce me, untie, or break that knot again,
Take me to you, imprison me, for I
Except you enthral me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

(Smith, 1980, p. 314)

Discussion

Donne's poem has fourteen lines, and the first eight, as you probably noticed, rhyme ABBAABBA, as in the Petrarchan form of the sonnet. The turn comes with the word 'Yet', indicating a new surge of poetic potency. The sestet is more complicated, as Donne has adapted the form of a Shakespearean sonnet instead, using a final rhyming couplet. (In this reading the 'enemy' of line 10 and 'I' of line 12 also rhyme.) But even though the rhyme in 'Batter my heart' is quite clear and prominent, it does not seem to create effects of balance or regularity. One of the main reasons is that it is prevented from doing so by the comparative force of the alliterated words, which pull against one another, slowing everything down in the complicated series of sounds and rhythms in each line. If you didn't read the poem aloud first of all, do so now to see just how effectively the sounds do this – the first four lines should be enough. Listening to it again on DVD 1 will help here too. The way that the sounds of the poem do battle with each other perfectly complements the emotional, psychological and spiritual battle that the poem describes between Donne's poetic voice and his God. One word that may have struck you in particular is 'divorce', when Donne is describing his desire to be forced apart from 'your enemy' and reunited with 'you' (God). Highly unusual in this context, it illustrates very well the tension the poem exploits between earthly, physical attraction and relationships and a more spiritual love. Overall, then, this poem helps to explain why Donne is known for the imaginative and powerful merging of the secular and the divine in his poetic texts, combining the authority of one with the authority of the other, bringing all his experience to bear in this particular impassioned, effectively wrought, poetic outpouring.

Donne's poetic voice as he addresses God in this second poem is erotic rather than distant, questing rather than certain, needy and passionate, and resentful too. It is important to bear in mind the complexities of that voice, alongside the image of the grand poet of the English canon, as you progress to think about other voices and texts of authority in this book.

2.2 The musical canon

This section of Chapter 2 complements your study of the canon in English Literature in the preceding section. It will introduce you to a selection of vocal genres so that you can consider voices in conjunction with texts. You will investigate the nature of a range of musical texts, and will study examples drawn from different musical repertoires. You will also consider the cultural contexts for these examples and will explore some issues relating to the performance of music.

The study of Music as an academic discipline is very rich in that it includes many different skills. Although music can be difficult to write about because it is temporal, this section will give you some of the tools you need to articulate your feelings and to comment critically on a piece of music.

Some technical musical language

Virtually all music shares the same basic elements of musical language – pulse, tempo, rhythm, pitch, melody, harmony, texture, timbre and dynamics. These elements are combined and interact within a piece of music in different ways.

Pulse is the regular pattern of stresses (referred to individually as beats) that runs throughout a piece of music. Music almost always has a pulse, but in some pieces it is clearer to hear than in others.

Tempo is the term used to describe the speed of the music. To create contrast and interest composers often vary the tempo within a piece of music.

Rhythm is the way in which sounds are distributed over time, but, unlike the pulse, these sounds can last for varied lengths of time. Some notes are short and will seem to move fast, while others will last longer and could seem to move more slowly. Some rhythms are even and smooth, while others are uneven. One way to think about the relationship between rhythm and pulse is to think about speech. Speech tends to have rhythm, but it does not necessarily have a regular pulse.

Pitch is the way in which notes sound high or low in relation to one another.

Melody or **tune** is created by combining rhythm and pitch. The way in which these two elements are manipulated to create melody can produce a range of effects. A melody can be constructed from several phrases. A musical phrase is a short, self-contained group of notes, rather like a phrase in writing or speaking.

Harmony is created when different pitches are played together at the same time. Some harmonies are consonant, which means the pitches are blended together to make pleasing sounds that are easy to listen to. Others are dissonant, where sounds created by certain pitch combinations are relatively harsh and grating. Two or more pitches played simultaneously together as one unit are called a **chord**. The adjective used to describe a texture using a succession of chords is **chordal**.

Texture is a term used to refer to the ways in which different lines of music interweave. The simplest musical texture is a single unaccompanied melodic line, while combinations of voices and instruments playing different parts simultaneously create more complex musical textures.

Timbre is the different sound qualities of instruments and voices. Individual instruments have their own timbres.

Dynamics is the term used to describe the range of volume or loudness in a piece of music. A variety of dynamics in a piece can create contrast and add to the expressive content: *forte* (*f*) is loud; *piano* (*p*) is quiet.

The first activity in this section will give you some practice in attentive listening and in using musical terminology.

Activity

This activity should take you about 15 minutes.

Listen to 'Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika' sung by the Mahotella Queens on DVD 1. You may want to play it two or three times. (For now, just concentrate on what you hear. You will learn more about the context of the piece after the activity.) Next, jot down some comments based on the following questions:

1. What can you say about the tempo of the piece? Does it remain the same throughout?
2. Can you say anything about the overall mood of the piece?
3. Does it contain repetitions?
4. Do the voices always sing together?
5. How would you describe the sound quality of the voices you hear?

6 What do you notice about the use of language?

Discussion

1 I would say that the tempo of the piece is quite moderate and remains largely the same throughout.

2 It is perhaps difficult to say much about the mood, but it seems to be a piece with a purpose – it sounds as though it's going somewhere.

3 There is a lot of repetition in the piece, with several lines of music recurring.

4 The piece is for three voices singing in harmony, and although for much of the time they sing together, there are also places where one voice sings alone, answered by the others.

5 The voices have a very warm and expressive quality, with some slides as they sing.

6 I deliberately didn't give you the words in order to make you focus on the sound of the music, but you may have noticed the change of languages across the piece.

The use of language in 'Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika' is very interesting. Turn to Reading 2.1 and read the words. As you can see, several languages are brought together in this piece. This is because 'Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika' has, since 1997, been the South African national anthem, combining lyrics from five of the country's languages: Xhosa, Zulu, Sesotho, Afrikaans and English. The political resonances of this anthem have changed radically between its adoption as the national anthem and its composition one hundred years earlier in 1897. It was originally sung as a church hymn, later became transformed into a song of protest against the apartheid government and the unofficial anthem of the African National Congress (ANC), and is now manifest in this current multilingual form, the one that you hear at rugby matches and suchlike. The version on DVD 1 was recorded by a South African group, the Mahotella Queens, for their album *Reign and Shine* (2005). This group performs songs in three parts, usually in close harmony, and sometimes with a backing band.

You will read about the ANC again in Chapter 4.

Many other versions of 'Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika' are available, one of which is included on DVD 1, though this performance (by Ladysmith Black Mambazo) is the older version and not the multilingual one. The anthem you've just heard assumed canonical status in South Africa in the apartheid years.

The idea of a musical canon

In classical music the word 'canon' is used to describe a body of works in particular genres, such as symphonies, concertos and operas, that have become recognised as 'masterpieces' by a range of critics, performers and audiences. As with the list of literary works in Section 2.1, the musical canon is not a strict and defined list of pieces, but rather an assumed understanding that certain types of music – the works of particular composers – have what might be called a benchmark status. *Messiah*, by George Frideric Handel (1685–1759), the operas of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–91) and the symphonies of Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827), might fit into this category. Linked to this canon of musical works are people, institutions and performing organisations. So, for example, names such as the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, BBC Radio 3 and Luciano Pavarotti are associated with exceptional standards and approaches to performance. Equally, important venues such as the Royal Albert Hall in London (Figure 2.3) and the Musikverein in Vienna (Figure 2.4) have a tremendously high status and carry a sense of authority in the musical world.

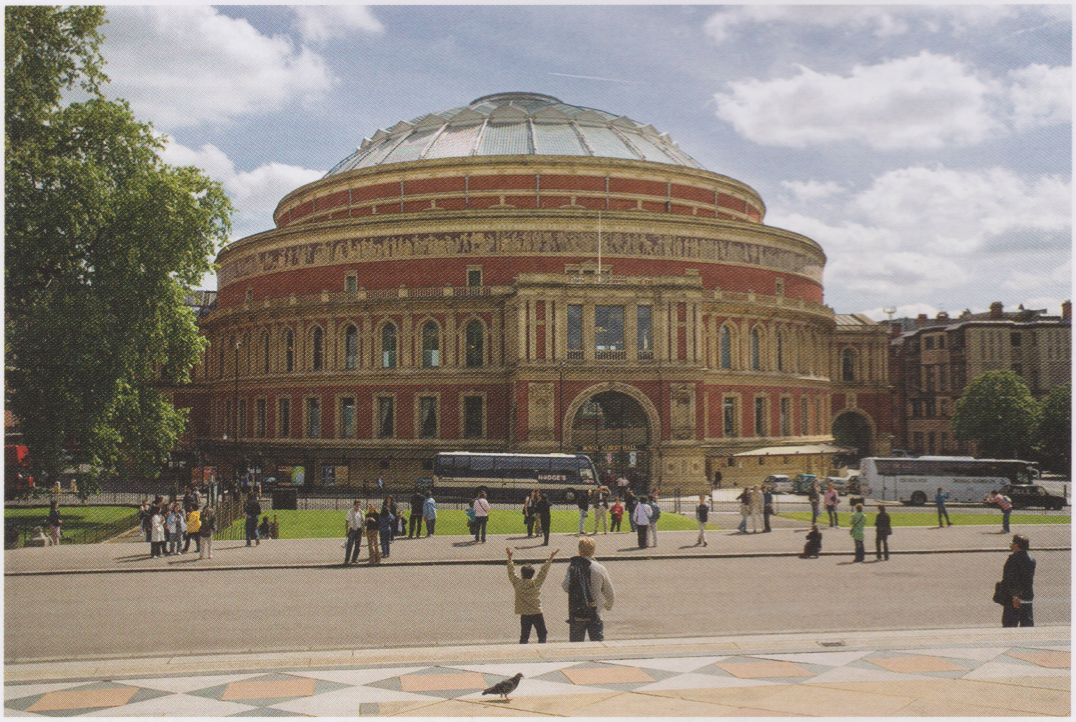

Figure 2.3 Royal Albert Hall, London. Photo: © Enigma/Alamy.

However, there is not just one musical canon, but several. It might be argued that in addition to a wider canon of classical music, there are also smaller canons of nineteenth-century piano music, of string

Figure 2.4 Wiener Musikverein, Vienna, Austria, 2009. Photographed by B. O'Kane. Photo: © B. O'Kane/Alamy.

quartets, of Viennese waltzes and so on – subsets as it were. Equally, there are canons in other types of music. Names such as Louis Armstrong and Charlie Parker would undoubtedly figure in thoughts of a jazz canon. If we were to think of a canon of pop groups it would be impossible to ignore The Beatles, but it is also possible to think of a body of music from smaller and more defined periods such as the 1970s or the 1980s that has become canonical. For example, my candidates for canonical songs from the 1980s might include music by The Police, Human League, Pet Shop Boys, Adam Ant, The Smiths. But another person's 1980s canon could look quite different, maybe more like this: The Jam, Madness, U2, Eurythmics, a-ha. It has to be said, however, that this type of 'canon' of recent songs is more a reflection of personal taste than of works that have stood the test of time.

So how do we know when a work is canonical? There is no formal list of canonical music and furthermore, like the literary canon, it evolves and changes. Handel's music was very successful and popular during his lifetime, but much less performed after his death until it was revived by the Victorians. In the above example of music from the 1980s, there are songs that have become known as canonical, 'classic' songs of the decade for a range of reasons – maybe because of their continued sales or their association with the era (for example, the use of music by The Jam in the film *Billy Elliot* (2000), or Duran Duran's association with the James Bond film *A View to a Kill* (1985)).

This process of change is often reflected in images and design details, for example on covers of sheet music produced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

This activity should take you about 10 minutes.

Activity

Figure 2.5 shows the cover from *Lobgesang* (Hymn of Praise, 1840), a choral work composed by Felix Mendelssohn (1809–47). It was produced by Novello and Co., a leading publisher of classical music. Look closely at the names of composers used in the borders on the cover and make a list of the names you see. Then arrange them from most canonical to least known.

Discussion

These are the names you see in my order:

Beethoven
Mozart
Bach
Handel
Haydn
Mendelssohn
Weber
Spohr

Your order might differ slightly. For example, you might place Mozart at the top. The Victorians prized the **Baroque** composers, hence you can see evidence of the considered musical canon of this time on this cover: Handel and Bach are in pride of place at the top and bottom of the cover, with around them Spohr, Mendelssohn, Weber, Mozart, Beethoven and Haydn. However, while you may have heard of the last three composers, you may not have come across Louis Spohr (1784–1859), whose music is now neglected by comparison.

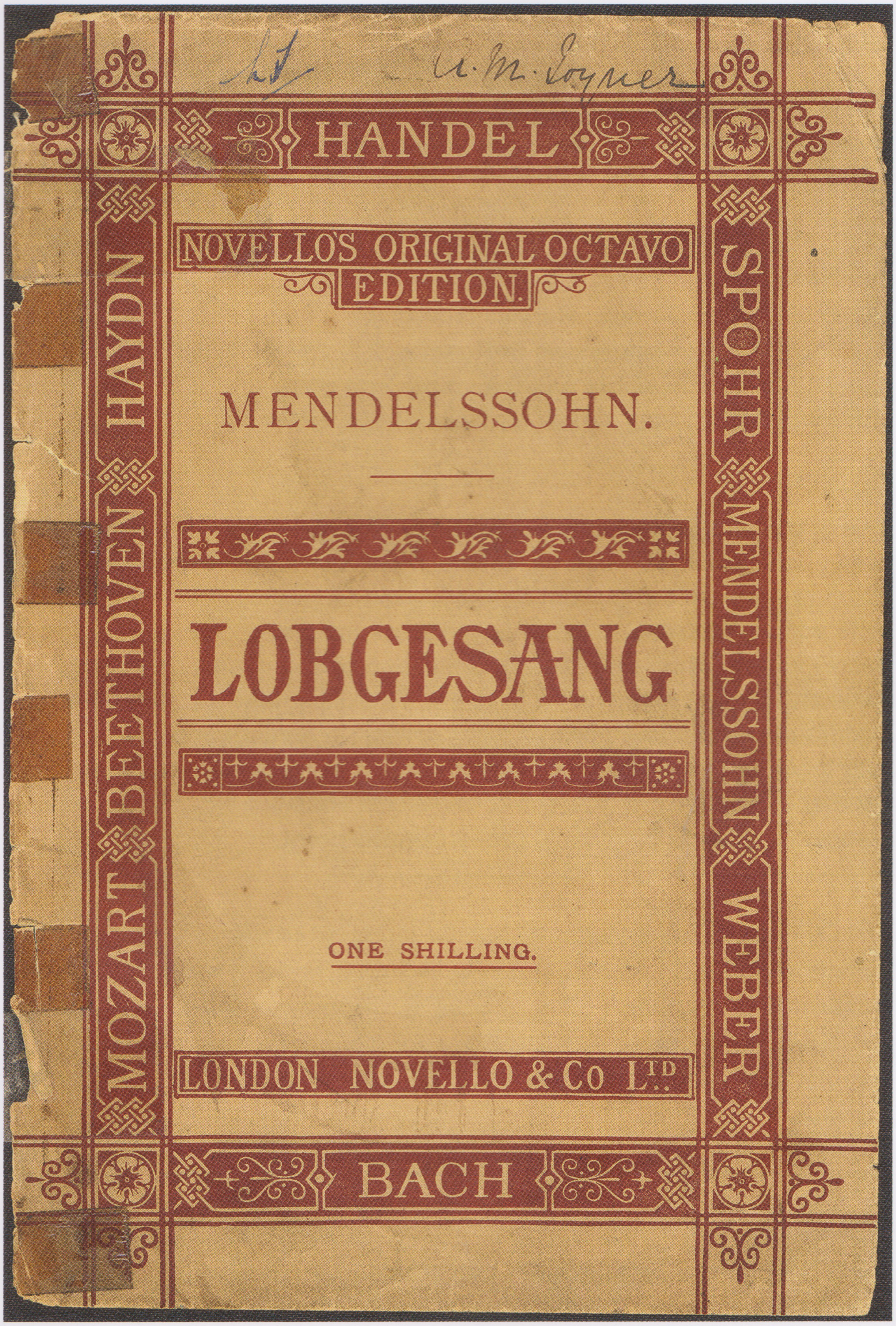
M.T.
A. M. Joyner
HANDEL
NOVELLO'S ORIGINAL OCTAVO EDITION.
MENDELSSOHN.
LOBGESANG
ONE SHILLING.
LONDON NOVELLO & Co LTD
BACH
MOZART BEETHOVEN HAYDN
SPOHR MENDELSSOHN WEBER

Figure 2.5 *Lobgesang*, cover for Mendelssohn's musical score. Produced by Novello and Co., London.

Canonical vocal works

Next, I'll introduce you to some short examples of what might be considered to be pieces belonging to a musical canon, all of which involve voices.

This activity should take you about 10–15 minutes.

Activity

Listen to 'George Frideric Handel: "Hallelujah" chorus (version 1)' on DVD 1. The words are shown in Reading 2.2. As you listen to it, concentrate on the words and the voices and orchestra performing them, and try to note in very simple terms what you are hearing.

Discussion

This is possibly the best-known example of a piece of choral music. It is written for a traditional chorus, consisting of four different voice types, which range from the highest female voices (sopranos) to the lowest male voices (basses). In between there are female (alto) voices and male (tenor) voices. This is the standard makeup of a conventional mixed-voice choir, often abbreviated to SATB. The piece that you hear uses a mixture of **unison** and **contrapuntal** writing. In some places the voices sing together in harmony, or in chords. In other places one voice follows another in **imitation** or two different melodic lines are woven against one another: this type of writing is called **counterpoint**.

The 'Hallelujah' chorus comes from a larger work, *Messiah*, written by Handel in 1741, while he was living in Brook Street, London, and first performed in Dublin in 1742. *Messiah* is an oratorio, a canonical musical genre used by composers for the last four hundred years. (In music, a genre is a type of musical work, for example symphony, opera, oratorio.)

Oratorio

An oratorio is a large musical composition for voices and orchestra, including a choir and soloists. Structurally it has some similarities with opera, but is a concert piece performed in a church or concert hall without costumes or movement. There is usually a story on a sacred topic – in the case above, the life of Jesus – and the work is structured in acts divided into a number of small movements, some of which are for soloists, some for chorus. *Messiah*, for example, has three parts (or acts). Part 1 deals with the Advent and

Christmas stories, Part 2 with the Easter story and Part 3 is based on events in the Book of Revelation.

Messiah has become part of the musical canon for a variety of reasons: its superb music, its popularity as a work that can be performed by both professionals and amateurs, and its importance over many generations. It is from the Baroque period, which in music lasted from around 1600 to 1750, and was popular at the time of its composition. Mozart made his own arrangement of *Messiah* with a larger orchestra, and nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British performances favoured huge orchestras (which sometimes additionally included brass bands) and choruses as a way of praising God though music (Figure 2.6).

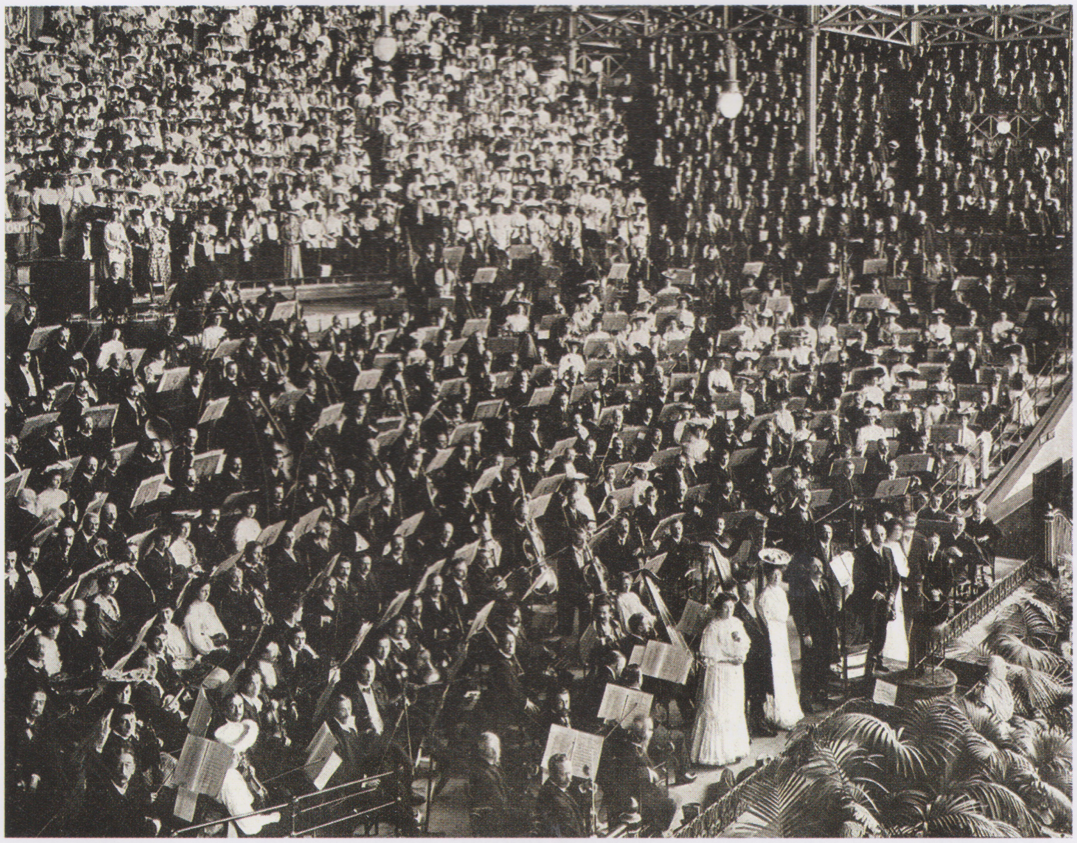

Figure 2.6 *Messiah,* George Frideric Handel. Conducted by F. Cowen at the annual festival, Crystal Palace, 1905. Photo: © Lebrecht Music and Arts Photo Library/Alamy.

However, in a study that considers 'authority', you might regard it as interesting that there is no definitive musical text for *Messiah* because of the many changes Handel himself made during the seasons it was performed in the 1740s and 1750s. Some numbers were recomposed or altered to suit a particular soloist. And later changes by editors have meant that there is no authoritative printed edition of the work.

This activity should take you about 15–20 minutes.

Activity

Turn to DVD 1 and listen again to 'George Frideric Handel: "Hallelujah" chorus (version 1)', which you heard in the last activity. Then, immediately afterwards, listen to 'George Frideric Handel: "Hallelujah" chorus (version 2)'. In the table below note very generally the differences between them. You can find the durations on DVD 1.

	Version 1	Version 2
Duration		
Speed		
Voices		
Orchestra		

Discussion

Close listening is one of the core skills in the study of Music as a discipline, and one of the features of the approach used in this chapter is to offer different versions of the same pieces, to help you develop your listening skills. I hope you managed to hear some of the principal differences between these two recordings. My comments are shown below:

	Version 1	Version 2
Duration	4 minutes 45 seconds	3 minutes 49 seconds
Speed	Quite ponderous	Much more lively, with a bouncy feel
Voices	Mixed voices, both male and female – very 'operatic' in sound	Only male voices
Orchestra	Full symphony orchestra, heavy and weighty	Smaller orchestra with a lighter sound

Version 1 was recorded some time ago now, in 1960, and features Leonard Bernstein conducting the New York Philharmonic Orchestra with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. I hope you logged that it was a whole minute longer than the second one. A performance of this type – very ponderous – might now be viewed as not in keeping with the spirit of the music. Version 2 was recorded in 1980 and is now regarded as a canonical recording of *Messiah*. This is because it sets out to be an 'authentic' performance, one that adheres to the performance conventions and values that applied when Handel wrote this work. In practice, what this means is that the choir consists of only male voices: boys taking the soprano line, then male altos, tenors and basses. In addition, the orchestral instruments used are as close as possible to the instruments played in the 1740s, and other issues such as tempi (speeds) and balance are carefully considered within their Baroque context. For example, it is much quicker than Bernstein's version. The conductor, Christopher Hogwood, founded this orchestra, the Academy of Ancient Music, in 1973, with the express purpose of trying to recreate, as far as is feasible, the intentions of the composer, both in notation and performance.

Activity

This activity should take you about 30 minutes.

Now it's up to you to comment on some musical examples. Listen to Examples 1–4 on DVD 1. For each of these four examples, first, describe what you hear. For example, is it one voice with an orchestra, or a vocal group? Is it accompanied or unaccompanied? Once you have done this, try to think of a reason why the example might be considered to be canonical. The words of each piece are shown in Readings 2.3, 2.4, 2.5 and 2.7.

Discussion

Example 1 is 'I vow to thee, my country', a hymn for a traditional church choir and organ. You hear only the first verse, here sung by male voices – boys and men. This could be considered to be canonical for a number of reasons. It is a well-known and popular hymn, but it has also become associated with important events, as will be discussed below.

Example 2 is for a solo voice (**baritone**) and orchestra. It is an aria from Mozart's 1786 opera, *The Marriage of Figaro*. Mozart's operas are an undisputed part of the canon of important Classical music. He wrote operas in German and in Italian, and had a hugely significant impact on operatic writing in the nineteenth century.

Example 3 is a recording of Ella Fitzgerald singing Cole Porter's song 'Anything Goes', for voice and small jazz band. She is one of the great voices of the twentieth century, and this is a canonical American song.

Example 4 is for a solo male voice with piano. It is a German song, or 'Lied', one of the principal genres of the **Classical** period and the nineteenth century.

At the end of this more detailed discussion is a box containing further information about the genres of hymn, opera and Lied.

You'll now build on your initial work with these examples, as you did with the Donne extracts in the first part of this chapter. Before you read on, though, listen to Examples 1–4 again as many times as you wish, to familiarise yourself with the pieces.

In the case of 'I vow to thee, my country', the words of the first verse refer to the sacrifice of those who died during the First World War, and were set to music by the British composer Gustav Holst (1874–1934). Holst took the tune from an existing piece of his own orchestral music, *The Planets* (1914–16). The hymn is now a regular feature of Armistice memorial ceremonies. It was sung at both the wedding and the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales. Through its poignant lyrics, familiar tune and range of nationalistic and political associations, it has come to carry a sense of authority.

Mozart's opera *The Marriage of Figaro* is an example of comic opera, known as **opera buffa**, and was first performed in Vienna in 1786. Vienna at this time was a remarkable creative centre of music, with four of the most significant composers of Classical music based there – Joseph Haydn (1732–1809), Mozart, Beethoven and Franz Schubert (1797–1828). Mozart spent the last ten years of his life in that city, and most of his major operas were composed for performance there. This opera was considered quite risqué at the time of writing, as the opera's **librettist**, Lorenzo da Ponte, adapted the story from a banned play by Pierre-Augustin Beaumarchais. It is an excellent example of the portrayal of character in opera, where particular types of music tend to be allotted to male and female characters. The **aria** you've heard is a typical example of the way in which music might be viewed as gendered. It is sung by the opera's protagonist, Figaro, and is correspondingly predominantly *forte* (loud) throughout, is a march in a bright, major key, uses an orchestra with prominent brass and timpani, and has a full texture. The melody sung by Figaro is based on chords and has many bold, assertive rising phrases.

In the next activity you will watch a short film giving you some contextual background to the performance of Mozart's operas in the eighteenth century. The film shows you some images of the Burgtheater in Vienna, where many works were performed, and then moves on to a theatre in Český Krumlov, close to the Austrian border in the Czech

Republic. This theatre holds a marvellous archive of opera sets from the late eighteenth century, and in the film you will see these sets in operation, with some extracts from *The Marriage of Figaro.*

Activity

This activity should take you about 25 minutes.

Now watch 'Opera in Classical Vienna' on DVD 1. What does this tell you about the impact of Viennese nobility on cultural life?

Discussion

In this film you see a surviving – and stunning – eighteenth-century theatre. Many Viennese noblemen at this time owned vast country estates outside the city, with extensive gardens, theatres and lavishly decorated rooms. This estate belonged to the house of Schwarzenberg and the theatre was built in the 1760s. It has fabulous sets requiring a team of operators. Composers saw their works performed in theatres such as this, and Italian singers were brought in to perform them, though not in the Lenten season when no operas were performed.

The third musical example you listened to was 'Anything Goes', a song that is regarded as belonging to the 'Great American Songbook', sometimes known as 'GAS'. The 'Great American Songbook' is a term used to refer to a body of songs from the 1920s to the 1960s, drawn from a range of backgrounds such as musical theatre and films, which have become a core part of the repertoire of singers and jazz musicians. There is no definitive list of songs, but such names as Irving Berlin (1888–1989) ('Cheek to Cheek', 'White Christmas'), George Gershwin (1898–1937) ('Summertime', 'I Got Rhythm'), Jerome Kern (1885–1945) ('Smoke Gets in Your Eyes') and Cole Porter (1891–1964) ('Anything Goes') are all considered as belonging to a group of iconic composers of great American songs.

Many of the songs in the Great American Songbook share a common musical structure featuring a verse and a chorus. The chorus is usually a 32-bar AABA or ABAC form, where there is a repeating A section with contrasting music for the B and C sections. Many singers and musicians have recorded or performed these songs, and you will find numerous versions of them, in very contrasting styles. One interesting performance of the song by Caroline O'Connor is included on DVD 1 (though in a slightly different version in terms of the text, with two additional verses, as shown in Reading 2.6). A third version of

'Anything Goes', by Lew Stone and his Band, is also included on DVD 1.

The fourth example, Schubert's song 'Erlkönig', is a setting of words by someone who is viewed as part of the canon of great German writers, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832). Its narrative tells of a child who dies in his father's arms, killed by a supernatural being, the Erl-king (the elf-king, or alder-king, a type of malevolent spirit). In the poem a young boy is being carried home at night by his father on horseback. As the poem unfolds, the son begins to see and hear spirits that his father does not: both the Erl-king and other ghostly presences. The father initially talks these away as nothing more than fog or leaves. But the child's increasing terror gradually convinces the father that something is wrong. The climax of the son's fright comes as he shrieks that the Erl-king has attacked him. The father rides faster, but his son lies dead in his arms.

What makes Schubert's song so special is the way in which one voice sings four characters: narrator, father, son and the Erl-king, while the piano plays the part of the horse, with constant pounding movement. Schubert places each role in a slightly different vocal range, and in this particular performance the singer also gives each role a slightly different vocal nuance. Thus the narrator is in the middle range of the voice, the father in the low range and the boy in a higher range. The Erl-king's vocal line snakes up and down and is sung more quietly to mirror the fact that only the boy can see him. In addition, each time the boy sings his phrase is slightly higher and louder to create the sense of mounting terror. One interesting feature of Schubert's approach to words is that he made a practice of returning to poems he had already set to music and viewing them from a new angle, often setting the words in a radically different manner. While he did not do this with 'Erlkönig', it is a feature of his fascination with word-setting. This particular song has been much discussed as an example of exceptional bringing together of voices and texts, as this passage demonstrates:

> The extent to which Schubert, in his eighteenth year, had developed this control of an aspect of song-writing in which art and craft meet shows itself nowhere more dazzlingly than in 'Erlkönig'. 'Erlkönig' is, of course, a dramatic ballad, this time by the greatest of Schubert's poets, Goethe. … A poem exuding such mystery, suspense and excitement, and driving relentlessly forward on waves of juvenile fear and paternal anxiety – both approaching

> panic – was bound to encourage Schubert to draw upon the more dramatic elements of his musical vocabulary. 'Erlkönig' is a highly charged, graphic portrayal of a nightmarish tale, missing no opportunity to point up its passing details yet maintaining a galloping momentum from start to finish.
>
> (Newbould, 1997, p. 57)

Some canonical vocal genres

Hymn

A hymn is a type of song, usually religious, written for the purpose of praise, adoration or prayer. Ancient hymns include an important collection of Hindu hymns called the Vedas. The western tradition of hymnody – that is, the singing or composition of hymns – begins with the Greek Homeric hymns, dating from the eighth century BCE. Christian hymns are often written for particular events such as Christmas or Easter. Most of today's well-known hymns are written in four parts using the same standard layout, SATB. In many church services only the top line is sung, with the other parts played on the organ. Hymn accompaniments vary enormously depending on the particular form of worship, from synthesised instruments or small bands to unaccompanied voices.

Opera

An opera is a dramatic musical work in which singing takes the place of speech. Like a play, an opera is often structured in acts and scenes. Opera had its origins in sixteenth-century Florence. Many operas contain standard features: an overture (an orchestral opening), choruses, duets and other ensembles. Operas often use recitative, which is a declamatory, speech-like style of singing used to carry the plot forwards. An aria in an opera is a song sung by a particular character, which allows them to have a moment of reflection.

Lied

The German word for song is 'Lied' and its plural is 'Lieder'. Both words are commonly used to refer to examples of German song, especially from the nineteenth century. The origins of the Romantic Lieder repertory lie in the late eighteenth century, but the best-known works in the genre were composed after 1800 by Beethoven, Schubert, Robert Schumann (1810–56), Johannes Brahms (1833–97) and Hugo Wolf (1860–1903).

The song cycle

Each of the pieces you've heard so far has been discussed as a separate entity, though in two cases the item is part of a bigger whole – the Handel chorus is from an oratorio and the Mozart aria from an opera. The Schubert piece is an individual song, but there is also a larger-scale song genre called a song cycle.

A song cycle is a group of songs and poems either for voice and piano or for voice and orchestra that relate to one another in some way. Sometimes the songs may be only loosely connected, but in the nineteenth century this type of musical genre more commonly came to be used for sets of songs that either had a narrative thread or expressed a common theme. Some cycles set the words of only one poet, whereas in others poems by different poets are brought together as a set. Sometimes musical cross-quotations between songs create strong links across the song cycle as a whole. Two important examples include Schubert's *Winterreise* (Winter Journey, 1827, words by Wilhelm Müller) and Schumann's *Dichterliebe* (Poet's Love, 1840, words by Heinrich Heine).

We are now going to look at a song cycle from the twentieth century. In a hierarchy of twentieth-century English music, Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958) would feature quite highly. He had an interest in the revival of Tudor music, he was an important collector of folk-song and was equally important as one of the first composers to establish English song in the first part of the twentieth century. His choice of lyrics spanned nineteenth-century poets such as Algernon Charles Swinburne, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, and Christina and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, his contemporaries A(lfred) E(dward) Housman and Fredegond Shove, and earlier writers including William Blake, John Bunyan and Geoffrey Chaucer. One of the most successful and popular of his early works was a song cycle, *Songs of Travel* (1901–4). This was a collection of settings of verse by the Scottish poet Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–94). One of the attractions of Stevenson's words was that they were conceived with melody in mind and all have simple, stanzaic structures that lend themselves to song-setting.

Activity

This activity should take you about 20 minutes.

The first song from *Songs of Travel*, 'The Vagabond', is on DVD 1. The words are shown in Reading 2.8. Listen to 'Ralph Vaughan Williams: The Vagabond' and answer the following questions:

1. If you take verse 1 to be the 'A' material, what is the overall structure of the song? Listen to see if this A material repeats, and if there are places where it is altered.
2. What is the most obvious way in which Vaughan Williams captures the spirit of the poem in the music?

Discussion

1. There are two main passages of music, giving the overall pattern AABA. Thus verses 1, 2 and 4 use the same music, while verse 3 has a change of mood and new music.
2. I would say that the most obvious way in which Vaughan Williams captures the spirit of the poem is in the characteristic tramping figure that opens the song. The performance indications in the score of 'The Vagabond' enhance the sense of tramping movement, for example the performers are instructed to play 'pesante' (heavily) and 'robustamente' (robustly). The AABA structure of the song could also be interpreted as encapsulating the mood of the words: the only point at which the protagonist dreams of the 'fireside haven' is in the third stanza, where the music changes. By the fourth stanza the inexorable onward tramping has returned.

The overall theme of the songs in this cycle is that expressed in the title of the song cycle: travel. The image of a journey, especially a rural adventure, was something that pervaded much of the literature of the latter part of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries, and Stevenson's poems are part of a wider literary and artistic culture. Vaughan Williams made significant contributions to the development of English song as a genre in the first decade of the twentieth century, and produced a number of song cycles.

Case study: John Adams

This chapter ends with a short case study on the American composer John Adams. Adams is an interesting figure in terms of his approach to texts, and he has rapidly become one of the most important of twentieth-century American composers. Born in 1947, he has produced a number of significant vocal works, using a wide range of often controversial material and texts in different languages, and embracing several of the genres that you've studied above, for example song cycle and opera. Notable operas have included *Nixon in China* (1987) and *The Death of Klinghoffer* (1991). In 2000 he created a version of the Nativity story, *El Niño*, using texts from English, Spanish and Latin sources. He has also written many large-scale orchestral works, such as *The Dharma at Big Sur* (2003), a **concerto** for electric violin and orchestra which draws on Buddhist meditative traditions.

Before you move on to the main focus of this case study, Adams's opera *Doctor Atomic* (2005), the next activity will give you a flavour of this composer's music.

This activity should take you about 10 minutes.

Activity

Listen now to two short pieces by John Adams on DVD 1: 'For with God no thing shall be impossible', a complete song from *El Niño*, and 'extract from *The Dharma at Big Sur*'. Can you say anything about the musical styles of these two short pieces?

Discussion

There are two different musical styles here. The first is very rhythmic and driving, with repeating patterns. The second is meditative and much more fluid. You will find both of these styles in *Doctor Atomic*.

As with several earlier works by Adams, the subject matter of *Doctor Atomic* is political, in this case focusing on Dr Robert Oppenheimer (1904–67) and the testing of the first atomic bomb at Los Alamos in Mexico – the so-called 'Trinity' test. Specifically, you will listen to a musical interpretation by Adams of the Donne poem 'Batter my heart', which you read in Section 2.1.

Activity

Read Adams's own account of Oppenheimer below. Why do you think he might have been an attractive subject for a composer writing an opera?

> Oppenheimer, known as 'Oppie' to his friends and students, was certainly a magnetic figure for dramatic treatment. In life he possessed qualities we don't usually associate with scientists. He was highly cultured in all the arts; immensely

> literate; able to speak fluent German, French, and Dutch; and had a reading command of half a dozen more languages, including Sanskrit, which he learned so that he could read the Bhagavad Gita in its original form. He collected paintings – there was a van Gogh among the family's artworks – and he listened exclusively to classical music. Among his favorite pieces were the late Beethoven quartets, and it is said that in his last years, while living at Princeton, he met Stravinsky and became a fan of that composer's twelve-tone *Requiem Canticles*. This was not your standard playlist for a physicist. At Harvard, as an eighteen-year-old taking advanced graduate courses in physics and chemistry, he unwound at night by composing sonnets. Some twenty-five years later, in the anxious hours leading up to the test firing of the bomb, he is rumored to have calmed his shattered nerves by reading from a tattered copy of Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal*, which he kept as a kind of spiritual vade mecum. He and his youngest brother, Frank, had the benefit of an elite education, the finest tutors, travel, and exposure from a young age to high culture. The family's wealth, the result of their immigrant father's successful import business, gave them a certain sense of independence and ease in social circles.
>
> (Adams, 2008, p. 274)

Discussion

Perhaps one of the reasons why Adams was drawn to this subject was that Oppenheimer, with his great interest in art, music and literature, offered scope for the composer to draw on these connections. His fascination for languages finds its way into the **libretto**.

Adams's opera is structured in two big acts differentiated by time and emotion. Act 1 is set a few weeks before the bomb is to be tested. Act 2 takes place on the morning of 15 July 1945, the day of the test, and ends just before the bomb is detonated. The key figure in the opera is naturally Oppenheimer himself, with some less important solo roles and a chorus.

Of particular interest in your study of *Voices and texts* is the way in which the opera's libretto was constructed. Peter Sellars (b. 1957) created the libretto from an amalgam and adaptation of a number of historical and literary sources such as declassified US government documents and communications between the scientists, government officials and military personnel who were involved in the project. In addition, it quotes extensively from the famous Hindu scripture, the *Bhagavadgītā*, from the poetry of Charles Baudelaire (1821–67) and Muriel Rukeyser (1913–80), and from the religious poems of John Donne.

Figure 2.7 *Doctor Atomic*, John Adams, London Coliseum, 2009. Photographed by Laurie Lewis. Photo: © Laurie Lewis/Lebrecht Music & Arts.

Act 1 concludes with an aria sung by Oppenheimer, the setting of Donne's 'Batter my heart'. The poem is used here as a means of expressing Oppenheimer's crisis of faith in the atomic bomb he has created. The use of the Donne poem in this context has some parallels with the use of *Antigone* in *The Island*, which you will study in Chapter 4.

This activity should take you about 30 minutes if you watch the extract twice as suggested.

Activity

Before you turn to Adams's setting of 'Batter my heart', reread the poem, in the last activity in Section 2.1, along with the discussion of it immediately after the activity. Then watch the performance of 'Batter my heart' from Adams's *Doctor Atomic* on DVD 1. It lasts about 7 minutes. In this initial viewing, jot down your thoughts on Adams's interpretation of this poem. Then watch the film once more.

Discussion

My own feeling is that Adams turns these words into a highly emotional, personal outpouring of guilt. Oppenheimer sings alone on the stage, the poetry drawn out into a long soliloquy, with orchestral interjections. You may have noticed that the orchestral interruptions are very fierce, injecting an energy into the mainly slow, expressive vocal piece – expressing the turbulence in Oppenheimer's mind. I hope you spotted this contrast of musical styles.

You may be interested to read Adams's account, given below, of how he and Sellars approached this poem. Note that the reference to a D minor chord is to the static harmony that underpins the singing, allowing the voice to project the words in a theatre.

> In an inspired decision, Peter placed the famous John Donne *Holy Sonnet*, 'Batter my heart, three-person'd God,' at the very end of act 1. Oppenheimer was much drawn to the metaphysical poets Donne, Andrew Marvell, and George Herbert. The 'three-person'd God' of Donne's poem provided the stimulus for Oppenheimer's whimsical naming of the test site: Trinity. The image of the physicist, alone at last, contemplating his dark, destructive creation, drew from me a musically strange response, but one that in retrospect seems entirely appropriate. After a whole act of music that teeters on the cusp of atonality, 'Batter my heart' appears as an archaic trope, its D-minor chord sequences projecting a slow, stately gravitas that to me spoke for the poem's content as well as for what must surely have been Oppenheimer's wildly conflicting emotions. How could this supremely intelligent and sensitive man not have peered into the terrible future of what this bomb would bring? How could he not have suspected the horrific, lingering pain and slow agonising death that its radiation would cause for tens of thousands of innocent civilians? The Donne poem is an expression of the keenest spiritual pain, a beseeching, an appeal to God that He physically beat and batter the speaker in order that his divided self might rise up and be made whole again:
>
> That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
> Your force, to break, blow, burn and make me new.

> Oppenheimer sings these words in the depth of night while standing alone in front of the sinister plutonium sphere that has been swathed shroud-like in a canvas tent. It was one of the eeriest and most disturbing stage images I'd ever witnessed. When Oppenheimer is done singing and the orchestral coda batters the last of a sequence of D-minor chords, he unfolds a flap of the tent and disappears into it, like a man going back into the womb. Gerald Finley, the Canadian-born baritone for whom I wrote the role, sang this aria with an intensity of feeling that never failed to leave the hall rapt in awe. Rarely had I experienced a moment when the performance of a piece of mine brought so much more to the music than its composer had imagined.
>
> (Adams, 2008, pp. 285–6)

Conclusion

In this chapter you have extended your study of Book 1's themes – voices, texts and authority – to include ideas about canons and classics. Before you move on to the topic of 'remaking authority' in Chapters 3 and 4, you might like to reflect on the way your understandings of authority, canons and classics have been developed through your study of literary and musical examples.

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Readings

Reading 2.1: ‘Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika’

(Xhosa) Nkosi sikelel’ iAfrika	God [Lord] bless Africa
Maluphakanyisw’ uphondo lwayo,	May her glory be lifted high
(Zulu) Yizwa imithandazo yethu,	Hear our petitions
Nkosi sikelela, thina lusapho lwayo.	God bless us, Your children.
(Sesotho) Morena boloka setjhaba sa heso,	God we ask You to protect our nation
O fedise dintwa le matshwenyeho,	Intervene and end all conflicts
O se boloke, O se boloke setjhaba sa heso,	Protect us, protect our nation, our nation,
Setjhaba sa, South Afrika – South Afrika.	South Africa – South Africa.
(Afrikaans) Uit die blou van onse hemel,	From the blueness of our skies,
Uit die diepte van ons see,	From the depths of our oceans,
Oor ons ewige gebergtes,	Over our everlasting mountain ranges,
Waar die kranse antwoord gee,	Where the cliffs give answer to our call,

(English) Sounds the call to come together,
And united we shall stand,
Let us live and strive for freedom,
In South Africa our land.

Source: Wikipedia (2010) ‘National anthem of South Africa’ [online] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_anthem_of_South_Africa (Accessed 19 April 2010)

Reading 2.2: The 'Hallelujah' chorus from *Messiah* (1741)

Music by George Frideric Handel

Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

The kingdom of this world
Is become the kingdom of our Lord,
And of His Christ, and of His Christ;
And He shall reign for ever and ever,
For ever and ever, for ever and ever,

King of kings, and Lord of lords,
King of kings, and Lord of lords,
And Lord of lords,
And He shall reign,
And He shall reign for ever and ever,
King of kings, for ever and ever,
And Lord of lords,
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

And He shall reign for ever and ever,
King of kings! and Lord of lords!
And He shall reign for ever and ever,
King of kings! and Lord of lords!
Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
Hallelujah!

(Transcribed from the performance on DVD 1)

Reading 2.3: 'I vow to thee, my country' (1921)

Music by Gustav Holst, words by Sir Cecil Spring-Rice

I vow to thee, my country, all earthly things above,
Entire and whole and perfect, the service of my love;
The love that asks no question, the love that stands the test,
That lays upon the altar the dearest and the best;
The love that never falters, the love that pays the price,
The love that makes undaunted the final sacrifice.

(Transcribed from the performance on DVD 1)

Reading 2.4: ‘Non più andrai’ from the opera *Le Nozze di Figaro* (*The Marriage of Figaro*) (1786)

Music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, words by Lorenzo da Ponte

Non più andrai, farfallone amoroso,
Notte e giorno d’intorno girando;
Delle belle turbando il riposo,
Narcisetto, Adoncino d’amor.
Non più avrai questi bei pennacchini,
Quel cappello leggero e galante
Quella chioma, quell’aria brillante,
Quel vermiglio donnesco color.

Tra guerrieri, poffar Bacco!
Gran mustacchi, stretto sacco.
Schioppo in spalla, sciabla al fianco,
Collo dritto, muso franco,
Un gran casco, o un gran turbante,
Molto onor, poco contante!
Ed invece del fandango
Una marcia per il fango
Per montagne, per valloni
Con le nevi e i sollioni

Al concerto di tromboni
Di bombarde, di cannoni
Che le palle in tutti i tuoni
All’orecchio fan fischiar.
Cherubino alla vittoria,
Alla gloria militar.

No more will you go, amorous butterfly,
Night and day wandering around;
Disturbing the repose of pretty women,
Little Narcissus, little Adonis of love.
No more will you have those fine plumes,
That hat so light and gay,
Those curls, that brilliant air,
That rosy and womanlike complexion.

Among soldiers, God approving,
Fierce moustaches, tightest tunic.
Shouldered musket, side-slung sabre,
Head erect with frank expression,
A great helmet or great turban,
Honour huge but little money!
And in place of the fandango
Just a march through mud and middens,
Through the mountains, through the valleys.
Through the snows and through the scorchings,

To the boom of the trombone,
And the mortar, and the cannon,
And the cannon-balls whose whistling
Sends a shudder through your ear.
Cherubino bound for glory,
Bound for glory in the field.

(Transcribed from the performance on DVD 1; English translation by Patricia Howard, 2001)

Reading 2.5: 'Anything Goes' (1934), version 1, sung by Ella Fitzgerald

Lyrics and music by Cole Porter

Times have changed,
And we've often rewound the clock,
Since the Puritans got a shock,
When they landed on Plymouth Rock.
If today,
Any shock they should try to stem,
'Stead of landing on Plymouth Rock,
Plymouth Rock would land on them.

In olden days a glimpse of stocking
Was looked on as something shocking,
Now, heaven knows,
Anything goes.
Good authors too who once knew better words,
Now only use four-letter words
Writing prose,
Anything goes.

The world has gone mad today
And good's bad today,
And black's white today,
And day's night today,
When most guys today
That women prize today
Are just silly gigolos.

So though I'm not a great romancer
I know that I'm bound to answer
When you propose,
Anything goes.

(Transcribed from the performance by Ella Fitzgerald on DVD 1)

Reading 2.6: 'Anything Goes', version 2, sung by Caroline O'Connor

Times have changed,
And we've often rewound the clock,
Since the Puritans got a shock,
When they landed on Plymouth Rock.
If today,
Any shock they should try to stem,
'Stead of landing on Plymouth Rock,
Plymouth Rock would land on them.

In olden days a glimpse of stocking
Was looked on as something shocking,
Now, heaven knows,
Anything goes.
Good authors too who once knew better words,
Now only use four-letter words
Writing prose,
Anything goes.

If saying your prayers you like,
If green pears you like,
If old chairs you like,
If back stairs you like,
If love affairs you like
With young bears you like,
Why, nobody will oppose!

So though I'm not a great romancer
I know that I'm bound to answer
When you propose,
Anything goes.

If driving fast cars you like,
If low bars you like,
If old hymns you like,
If bare limbs you like,
If Mae West you like,
Or me undressed you like,
Why, nobody will oppose!

And every night,
The set that's smart
Is intruding on nudist parties in studios,
Anything goes.

(Transcribed from the performance by Caroline O'Connor on DVD 1)

Reading 2.7: ‘Erlkönig’ (1824)

Music by Franz Schubert, words by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Erlkönig

Wer reitet so spät durch Nacht und Wind?
Es ist der Vater mit seinem Kind;
Er hat den Knaben wohl in dem Arm,
Er fasst ihn sicher, er hält ihn warm.

‘Mein Sohn, was birgst du so bang dein Gesicht?’
‘Siehst, Vater, du den Erlkönig nicht?
Den Erlenkönig mit Kron und Schweif?’
‘Mein Sohn, es ist ein Nebelstreif.’

‘Du liebes Kind, komm, geh mit mir!
Gar schöne Spiele spiel ich mit dir;
Manch bunte Blumen sind an dem Strand,
Meine Mutter hat manch gulden Gewand.’

‘Mein Vater, mein Vater, und hörest du nicht,
Was Erlenkönig mir leise verspricht?’
‘Sei ruhig, bleibe ruhig, mein Kind;
In dürren Blättern säuselt der Wind.’

‘Willst, feiner Knabe, du mit mir gehn?
Meine Töchter sollen dich warten schön;
Meine Töchter führen die nächtlichen Reihn
Und wiegen und tanzen und singen dich ein.’

‘Mein Vater, mein Vater, und siehst du nicht dort
Erlkönigs Töchter am düstern Ort?’
‘Mein Sohn, mein Sohn, ich seh es genau:
Es scheinen die alten Weiden so grau.’

The Erl-King

Who rides at a gallop through night so wild?
It is the father with his dear child.
He grips the boy firmly in his arms,
He holds him safe, he keeps him warm.

‘Son, why do you cower so fearfully?’
‘Father, the Erl-king! Can you not see?
The dreadful Erl-king with crown and tail?’
‘My son, it is mist blown by the gale.’

‘You lovely child, come away with me,
We’ll play together down by the sea;
Such pretty flowers grow on the shore,
My mother has golden robes in store.’

‘My father, my father, oh do you not hear
What the Erl-king whispers into my ear?’
‘Be calm, stay calm, it’s nothing my child
But dry leaves blown by the wind so wild.’

‘My fine young lad, won’t you come away?
My daughters are waiting for you to play;
My daughters will lead the dance through the night,
And sing and rock you until you sleep tight.’

‘My father, my father, can you still not see
The Erl-king’s daughters waiting for me?’
‘My son, my son, I can see quite clear
The moon on the willows, there’s nothing else there.’

'Ich liebe dich, mich reizt deine schöne Gestalt;	'I love you my boy, you are such a delight;
Und bist du nicht willig, so brauch ich Gewalt.'	And I'll take you by force if you put up a fight.'
'Mein Vater, mein Vater, jetzt fasst er mich an!	'My father, my father, he's gripping me fast!
Erlkönig hat mir ein Leids getan!'	The Erl-king is hurting! Help me, I'm lost!'
Dem Vater grauset's, er reitet geschwind,	The father shudders, and speeds through the night,
Er hält in Armen das ächzende Kind,	In his arms, he holds the moaning boy tight;
Erreicht den Hof mit Mühe und Not:	At last he arrives, to home and bed:
In seinen Armen das Kind war tot.	In the father's arms the child was dead.

(Transcribed from the performance on DVD 1; English translation by Robert Philip, 2004)

Reading 2.8: 'The Vagabond' (1824)

Music by Ralph Vaughan Williams, words by Robert Louis Stevenson

Give to me the life I love,
Let the lave go by me,
Give the jolly heaven above,
And the byway nigh me.
Bed in the bush with stars to see,
Bread I dip in the river –
There's the life for a man like me,
There's the life for ever.

Let the blow fall soon or late,
Let what will be o'er me;
Give the face of earth around,
And the road before me.
Wealth I seek not, hope nor love,
Nor a friend to know me;
All I seek, the heaven above,
And the road below me.

Or let autumn fall on me
Where afield I linger,
Silencing the bird on tree,
Biting the blue finger.
White as meal the frosty field –
Warm the fireside haven –
Not to autumn will I yield,
Not to winter even!

Let the blow fall soon or late,
Let what will be o'er me;
Give the face of earth around,
And the road before me.
Wealth I ask not, hope nor love,
Nor a friend to know me;
All I ask, the heaven above,
And the road below me.

(Transcribed from the performance on DVD 1)

3 Homer’s *Iliad*: gods, heroes and the authority of ancient Greece

James Robson

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Aims

This chapter will:

- help you to reflect further on the concepts of authority and canon by introducing you to Homer's epic poem, the *Iliad*
- introduce you to the theme of 'remaking authority' by looking at the afterlife of Homer's poetry alongside the poem 'Ceasefire' by Michael Longley
- give you an insight into the particular challenges of working with ancient Greek texts
- allow you to practise and develop skills of close listening and close reading.

Materials you will need

- DVD 1 (audio)

Introduction

In this chapter you will study part of one of the most canonical products of ancient Greek civilisation, Homer's *Iliad*, alongside the work of the modern Northern Irish poet Michael Longley, a number of whose poems have been inspired by Homeric material. As you work through the material in this chapter, you will gain an introduction to Homer and his world and consider further the themes of authority and the literary canon. Your studies will involve reading short extracts from Homer and Longley in detail as well as listening to recordings of longer passages of the *Iliad*.

This chapter also represents your first encounter in *Voices and texts* with the discipline of Classical Studies. This is a broad subject area which can include the study of a number of aspects of the ancient worlds of Greece and Rome – not only their literature (one aspect of which forms the subject of this chapter) but also their culture, art, languages, history, philosophy, and so on. One prominent branch of Classics is what is known as 'Reception Studies', which is the study of the reuse and reconfiguration of classical literature, art and ideas by later artists and thinkers (i.e. the way Greek and Roman culture has been 'received'). In this chapter, for example, you will look at the way in which a modern poet (Michael Longley) has reused and reconfigured a passage from Homer's *Iliad* in his poem 'Ceasefire'. The study of Longley's work will also lead you to consider broader questions about how the authority of a text is appropriated and renegotiated by later writers and cultures.

3.1 An Irishman's Homer: Michael Longley's 'Ceasefire'

On 3 September 1994, the *Irish Times* published a poem on its front page written by the Belfast-born poet Michael Longley (b. 1939). The poem took as its inspiration an episode from Homer's **epic poem** the *Iliad*, in which the king of Troy, Priam, secretly travels across enemy lines at night to the tent of one of the Greeks who are fighting to take his city: the great warrior-hero Achilles. The two men are bound together by a grim fate: Achilles has recently killed Priam's son, Hector, and maltreated his corpse – in revenge for Hector's killing of Achilles' beloved companion, Patroclus. King Priam pleads for the return of his son's corpse, while Achilles is filled with thoughts of his own fate. For he knows that he, too, will soon die at Troy, far from his native land and his beloved father.

Here is Longley's poem in full:

Ceasefire

I

Put in mind of his own father and moved to tears
Achilles took him by the hand and pushed the old king
Gently away, but Priam curled up at his feet and
Wept with him until their sadness filled the building.

II

Taking Hector's corpse into his own hands Achilles
Made sure it was washed and, for the old king's sake,
Laid out in uniform, ready for Priam to carry
Wrapped like a present home to Troy at daybreak.

III

When they had eaten together, it pleased them both
To stare at each other's beauty as lovers might,
Achilles built like a god, Priam good-looking still
And full of conversation, who earlier had sighed:

IV

'I get down on my knees and do what must be done
And kiss Achilles' hand, the killer of my son.'

(Longley, 2006, p. 225)

For readers of the *Irish Times* that day, the poem's title and subject matter would have had a special resonance. As you will later hear if you listen to Longley's own account of his poem on DVD 1, 'Ceasefire' was written amid rumours that the Irish Republican Army (IRA) were on the verge of declaring a cessation of hostilities at a time when the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland were the focus of considerable public and political attention. The IRA ceasefire came into effect from midnight on Wednesday, 31 August 1994, prompting the *Irish Times* to publish Longley's sonnet in its Saturday edition.

The Troubles

The Troubles was the name given to a violent period of Irish history, 1919–23, when the struggle for independence from Britain led to a bitter civil war. The same name was later used about a period of conflict in Northern Ireland, dating from the late 1960s onwards. The issue at stake was the constitutional status of Northern Ireland, with Nationalists (or Republicans: largely Roman Catholic) looking for Northern Ireland to become part of a united Irish state, and Unionists (or Loyalists: mostly Protestant) wanting the province to remain part of the United Kingdom. The conflict was largely resolved by the Northern Irish peace process of the 1990s which culminated in the 'Good Friday Agreement' of 1998. However, political and social tensions – as well as sporadic violence – have continued into the twenty-first century.

One of the hugely interesting aspects of a poem like 'Ceasefire', I think, is the way that it has such firm roots in two very different contexts – the ancient and the modern – and how these two contexts play off each other. For me, reading the poem with the 1990s Irish political and social context in mind lends a poignant and striking relevance to its themes of death, grief, empathy and the painful realities of coming to terms with one's (former) enemies. But the poem is also a reworking of a famous moment from an ancient poem – a sequence of 200 or so lines of verse from Book 24 of Homer's *Iliad* – and so also evokes a very different world: the epic poetry of ancient Greece, with its tales of godlike heroes and monumental battles. The poem therefore brings together the mythical past and the tangible present in what for me is a hugely stimulating way, with the two contexts illuminating each other. The canonical poetry of Homer is thus integrated with contemporary events, the authority of the Greek text providing a parallel to Northern Ireland's memorable recent history.

Activity

This activity should take you about 20 minutes.

I'd now like you to perform a brief activity regarding 'Ceasefire'. One point that struck me is that there must have been a great variation among the readers of the *Irish Times* that day in the extent to which they were familiar with Homer's poem: for some readers this would have been the first time they had encountered the story of Priam and Achilles (as it might now be for you), whereas others would have been more or less familiar with the events of this episode of the *Iliad*. I would like you to think about how the reactions of two different groups of readers might have varied, by considering the following questions:

1. How comprehensible is the poem to someone encountering the figures of Achilles and Priam for the first time?
2. What might a reader familiar with the *Iliad* have gained from the poem that another reader (one unfamiliar with the poem) might not?

To help you with this, you might like to refer back to the opening paragraph of this section, where some key events of the *Iliad* are summarised.

Reread 'Ceasefire' now and reflect on these questions before moving on to my discussion.

Discussion

1. As a student of the ancient world, I found it challenging to think myself into the position of someone who had never encountered the *Iliad* before. Looking at 'Ceasefire' from this perspective, however, I was struck by the way in which Longley selects and introduces the characters and events of his poem. In addition to the mention of the city of Troy, we find only three proper names there – Achilles, Priam and Hector – and by the end of the poem we are left in no doubt as to who these people are and what their relationship is to each other. We are told twice that Priam is an 'old king' (lines 2 and 6) and his age is also alluded to in lines 1 (where he reminds Achilles of 'his own father') and 11 (where he is described as 'good-looking still'). The mention of 'father' in line 1 also helps to establish Achilles' age relative to Priam's, and in the last line – if the reader has not worked it out before – we are made painfully aware of the relationship between the two men: Achilles is the killer of Priam's son, Hector. Longley is also careful to leave the context of the encounter fairly open: few details of time or place are evoked, and so in one respect it doesn't *matter* whether the reader knows where Troy is or that the

setting is ancient (tellingly, the hut in which the action of this episode of the *Iliad* takes place is referred to simply as a 'building': line 4; and did you note how a subtle nod was also given to the military context by the use of the word 'uniform': line 7?).

2 I have already begun to allude to some of the elements which a reader familiar with the *Iliad* might have noted about 'Ceasefire', such as how some elements of the Priam–Achilles episode are made less specific than in the original poem – like the use of the word 'building' in place of 'hut'. Another detail I spotted was the ritual washing of Hector's corpse. The washing of the body was an important element of burial ritual in the ancient Greek world and could be thought of as being especially necessary in the case of Hector's body: in the *Iliad*, Achilles defiles the corpse by attaching it to his chariot each day and dragging it around the burial mound of his dead companion, Patroclus. Interestingly, the washing of the body also plays an important role in the Irish funerary tradition, and so here we have a good example of Longley finding a communality between the two cultures. The night-time setting of the encounter is also evoked ('at daybreak', line 8) as is the frequent description of Achilles in the *Iliad* as 'godlike' (in line 11 he is 'built like a god'). Perhaps more striking still is the final rhyming couplet (i.e. the last two lines) of the poem where Priam kisses Achilles' hand. In Book 24 of the *Iliad*, we are told right at the beginning of the episode that Priam kisses Achilles' hand as he enters his tent, whereas in 'Ceasefire' the description of the kiss is postponed. In Longley's poem, then, special emphasis is placed on Priam's act of supplication, with the powerful two-line speech which ends the poem expressing what for a contemporary audience must have been highly challenging and uncomfortable ideas about the process of reconciliation.

Don't worry if your answer to the second question wasn't as full as mine: even if you have encountered Homer before, you are not expected to remember every detail of the poem. Later on in this chapter you will get a chance to look at a translation of the original Homeric sequence from the *Iliad* and therefore to make your own comparisons between the two texts.

So far we have been concentrating on how the details of the poem both correspond to and subtly reconfigure various elements of Book 24 of the *Iliad* – a far longer sequence that Longley has compressed into fourteen lines. But to look at the wood and not just the trees for a moment, part of the excitement of 'Ceasefire' for me as someone familiar with the *Iliad* is that it breathes fresh life into Homer by showing the Priam–Achilles episode in a new light, full of raw emotions and contemporary resonances. As I intimated above, I think that the modern and ancient contexts illuminate each other in 'Ceasefire' in a truly dynamic way – though perhaps you have your own views about a piece of poetry which is, after all, designed to appeal to the emotions as much as the intellect.

This poem is also interesting to consider from the point of view of authority. What difference does it make that 'Ceasefire' is based on a sequence from such a canonical poem as the *Iliad*? Personally, I find this an extremely difficult question to answer. For me as a classicist, the Homeric theme certainly captured my attention – and it also, perhaps, lends the poem an air of authority that it might otherwise not possess. But by inviting comparison with such a canonical work of literature as the *Iliad*, Longley could be said to have made his job difficult: the poem has a lot to live up to! For me, the circumstances of the poem's publication created a further set of expectations, too. The fact that the poem was published on the front page of the *Irish Times* at a key stage in Northern Ireland's history influenced the way that I read the poem, making me expect that the poem would be 'important' in some way.

3.2 Introducing the *Iliad* – Book 24: Achilles and Priam

So far we have been considering Homer's *Iliad* somewhat in the abstract – as a text with which some people are familiar and others not. Part of the purpose of this chapter, however, is to introduce you to the *Iliad* – both as a work of art in its own right and also as a poem that holds a key place in the literary canon and has exercised huge influence over western literature.

The *Iliad* was originally composed in a form of ancient Greek (a language which has much in common with the language spoken in Greece and Cyprus today) and so to engage with the *Iliad* means working with a translation of the poem. There are a large range of English-language translations of the *Iliad* to choose from, but for your work in this chapter you will be listening to (and reading) a version by the British/Canadian scholar Ian Johnston – a translation which has been chosen for its clarity and liveliness. The fact you are working in translation shouldn't worry you unduly, although it does inevitably mean missing out on the rhythm and other sound effects of the original, such as alliteration. Please note that it is the line numbers of the translation (and not the original poem) that are routinely given in this chapter.

Translating ancient texts

Translation Studies is a rich and complex area of scholarship. Historically, distinctions have often been made between translations that capture the 'letter' of the original text ('literal' translations) and those that convey the text's 'spirit' (and many translators aim to convey the 'letter' and the 'spirit', of course). One way in which the translation of the *Iliad* you are working with in this chapter clearly differs from the original Greek is that long sentences are often broken up and there are fewer words in each line of verse. And so in one sense, the translation might be said not to be faithful to the 'letter' of the Greek, since the rhythms of the original have been altered. But in another, it could be argued that the 'spirit' has been preserved, with these shorter lines helping to convey something of the pace and flow of the original poem.

You may recall that in the translation of the *Metta Sutta* you read in Chapter 1, the translator, Saddhatissa, also prioritised maintaining the 'spirit' over adhering to the rhythm of the original text.

Activity

This activity should take you about 20 minutes.

As an initial encounter with Homer's poetry, I would like you to listen to an audio recording of the sequence from Book 24 of the *Iliad* upon which Longley's 'Ceasefire' is based. This can be found on DVD 1 and lasts just over 20 minutes.

The purpose of listening to this audio recording is simply for you to enjoy the poem and to accustom yourself to Homeric idiom (albeit in translation). Note that the text does not appear in your printed materials: for the moment you should focus on listening to the poem (which means you will experience it in a similar way to the original audience who, as we shall see, would also have heard rather than read Homer's poetry).

Before you begin, a brief word on the context of this passage. Both Achilles and Priam have been sent messages from the gods: Achilles has been instructed to return Hector's body, and Priam has been told that he will receive safe passage if he visits the Greeks, who are encamped near their ships. On his journey from Troy, Priam encounters a handsome Greek who guides him to Achilles' hut. On arrival, this young man reveals to Priam that he is in fact the god Hermes, sent to provide a divine escort.

You will also find it helpful to know that in this extract Greece is referred to as 'Achaea' and the Greeks as 'the Achaeans', whereas Troy is also called by its alternative name, Ilion (from which the word 'Iliad' derives: i.e. the poem about Troy).

Listen to the recording 'Homer's *Iliad*, Book 24: Priam and Achilles' now.

Discussion

I hope you enjoyed listening to the passage and that you were able to spot the details you had already encountered in Longley's poem. I hope, too, that you were able to get to grips with all the people and places mentioned in these lines: unfamiliar proper names can seem daunting at first, as can some of the other features of Homeric poetry which are perhaps less familiar to modern readers, such as repetition of lines and phrases or the preponderance of (often lengthy) speeches. You will look in more detail at some of the distinctive features of Homer's style later on, but for now it will be useful for you to gain a brief overview of the context in which the *Iliad* was composed and to consider the place of Homeric poetry in the literary canon.

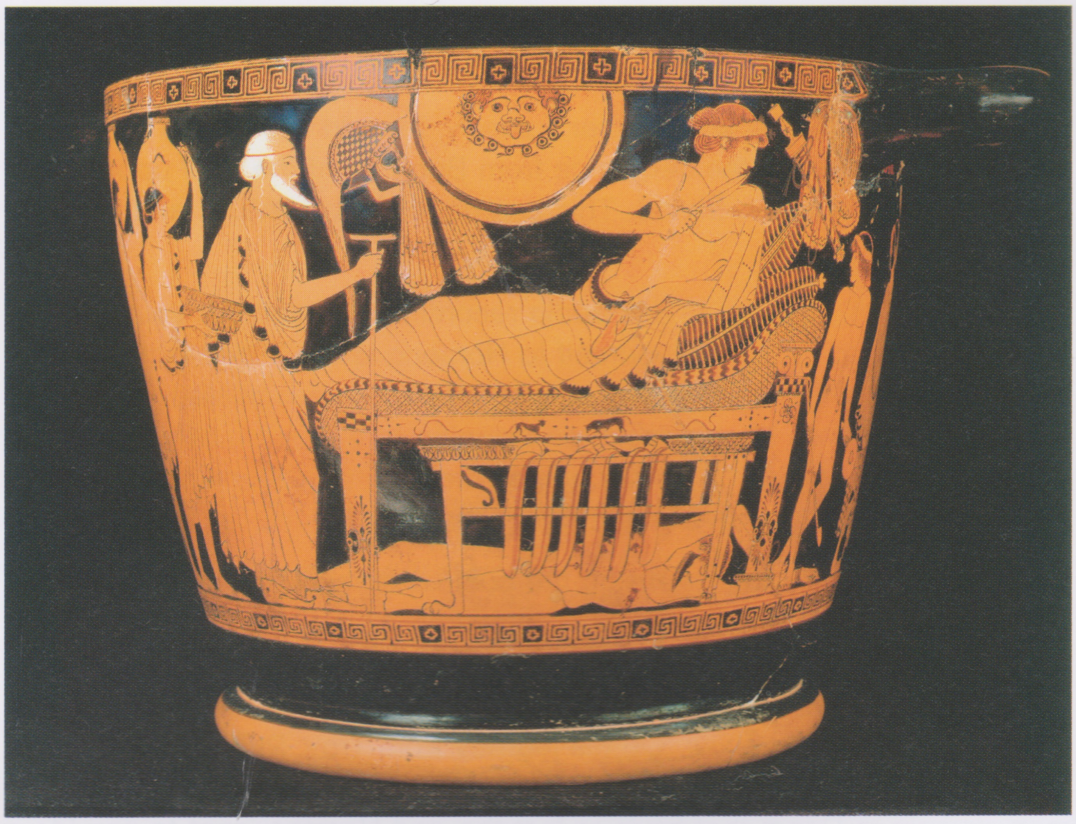

Figure 3.1 Priam in the presence of Achilles. Athenian red-figure *skyphos* by the Brygos Painter, *c*.480 BCE, height 25cm. Found at Cerveteri. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Inv.3710.ARV 380.171. Photographed by Erich Lessing. Photo: © akg-images/Erich Lessing.

3.3 Homeric poetry and the literary canon

By any measure, the *Iliad* is an extraordinary poem. Composed some time towards the end of the eighth century BCE (perhaps *c.*720–700 BCE, but maybe slightly later) it is commonly viewed as the earliest surviving work of European literature, slightly predating the *Odyssey* (the other epic poem attributed to Homer). Its age alone gives it a unique place in the western literary canon and no doubt goes part of the way to explaining the authority with which it has been invested by future generations and civilisations. Despite many later traditions as to who 'Homer' was, very little is known about the author – including, as a matter of fact, whether the composition of the poems can really be attributed to one individual. This is largely because the poems date from a period in Greek history about which we know relatively little and from which few written records survive: indeed, this is an era when writing was far from widespread on mainland Greece. This fact is also important for understanding the poems themselves since there is every reason to believe that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were composed without the aid of writing. And so the poems are thus said to be the product of 'oral composition' (which in turn has consequences for how we talk about them: Homer is a 'poet' or 'author', not a 'writer'; and students of Homer talk of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as having been 'composed', not 'written').

Given that these poems were either largely or entirely composed without the aid of writing, perhaps one of the most remarkable features about the Homeric epics is their length: the *Iliad* is a poem of some 15,000 lines, whereas the *Odyssey* stands at around 12,000 lines. The sheer scale of these poems would suggest, then, that in Homer's day a mature poetic tradition already existed, on which the author(s) of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were able to build. And this indeed seems to have been the case, since we have evidence of other epic poems dating from the Dark Ages, known to later Greeks but now lost. So it turns out that Homer was not the 'first' western poet: but importantly, the *Iliad* is the oldest poem to have survived.

A further point I would like to draw your attention to is the context in which the poems would originally have been performed. Epic poetry was composed to be sung or chanted to the strain of a lyre (which would probably have provided musical support rather than full-blown melodic accompaniment). The traditional Homeric performer would have been the 'bard' (of whom we meet two examples in the *Odyssey*) who would have recited large chunks of poetry as entertainment in contexts such as religious festivals and banquets (each performance presumably covering only a section of a poem).

The last point I want to discuss in this section is the afterlife that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* enjoyed. Homeric epic held an extremely influential position among later generations of Greeks and formed a keystone of their joint cultural heritage – something particularly significant given that 'Greece' was not a single political entity in ancient times, but rather a patchwork of city states, which were often at war with one another. Episodes from Homeric poetry continued to be alluded to and reworked by later writers and artists: some of the illustrations in this chapter represent vase paintings inspired by scenes from the *Iliad* for example. Following their composition – probably at some point in the mid-sixth century BCE – the Homeric epics began to be written down (rather than just passed down orally from bard to bard), but it was to be some time before a single, standard version of the text emerged. Evidence suggests that there were sometimes significant variations between the different versions of the *Iliad* that had been passed down until the point (somewhere in the third or second century BCE) where scholars working at the library in Alexandria compiled a definitive version of the text (it is this era from which the manuscript pictured in Figure 3.2 dates). It was at this period, too, that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were each divided into twenty-four 'books': one book for each letter of the Greek alphabet. The Priam–Achilles episode you've just listened to is to be found in Book 24, and therefore belongs to the closing section of the *Iliad*, which ends with Hector's funeral at Troy. The other sections of the poem you will study in this chapter are also among the most famous sections of the *Iliad*: Book 22, Achilles' battle with the Trojan warrior Hector; and Book 6, where the main protagonists are Hector and his wife, Andromache.

Nor was it just in ancient Greece that Homeric epic proved influential. A direct line can be traced from Homer to other epic poems, such as Virgil's *Aeneid* (written in Latin in the first century BCE), Dante's *Divine Comedy* (written in Italian in the early fourteenth century) and Milton's *Paradise Lost* (written in English in the seventeenth century). All these works hold influential places in their own literary traditions. In addition to these epic poems on new themes, there have also been influential translations of Homer into English, such as those by George Chapman

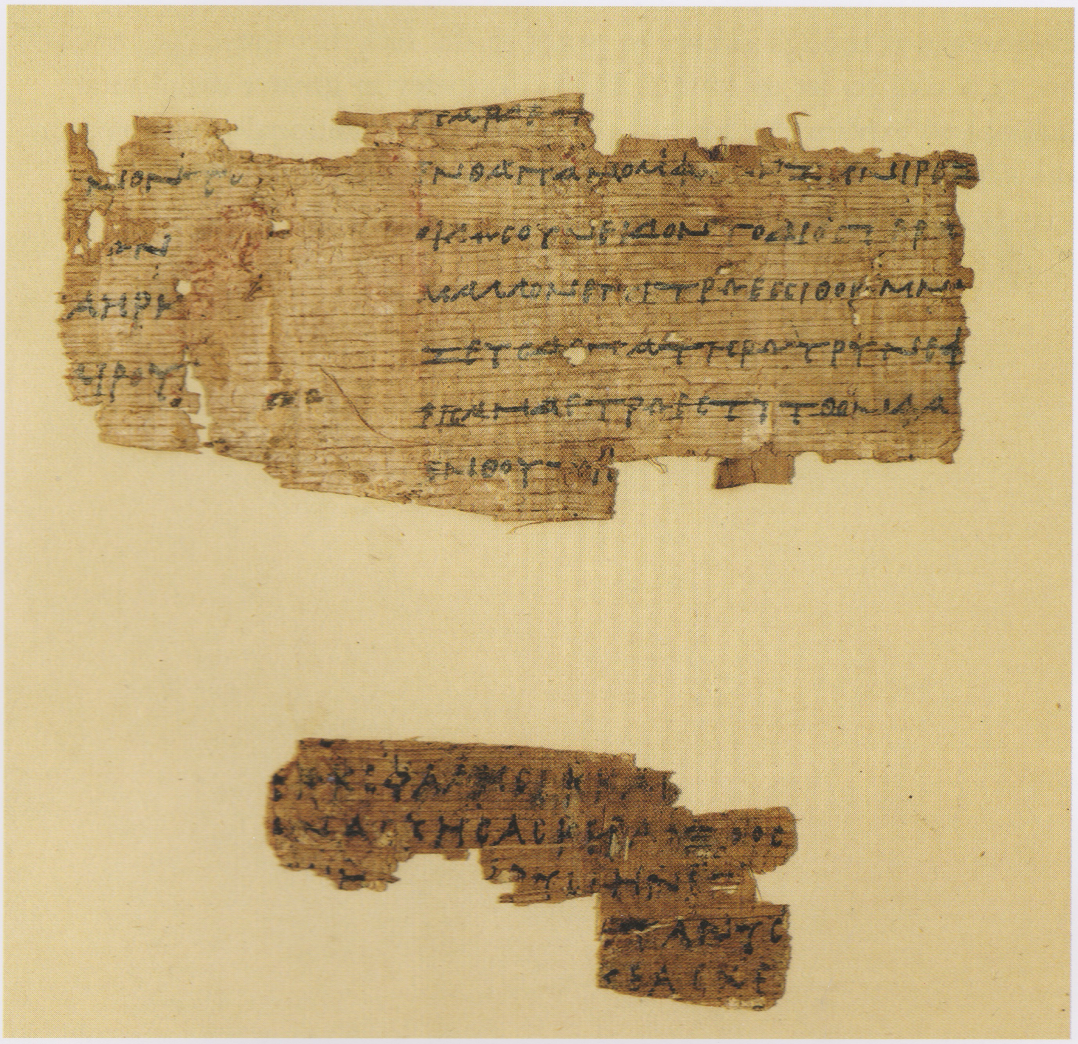

Figure 3.2 Papyrus fragment of Homer's *Iliad*, *c.*250 BCE: British Library, London, PAP 689. Photo: © British Library Board. All rights reserved.

(published in 1598) and Alexander Pope (published 1715–20) which themselves inspired English poets to turn to Homeric themes. Interesting, too, is the popularity which Homer's epics have enjoyed among English-speaking readers over the last 100 years. The Penguin Classics translations of the *Odyssey* and *Iliad* (first published 1946 and 1950 respectively) have sold well over four million copies between them, for example, and Homer was one of the most translated authors of the late twentieth century. Historically, Homeric epic has also inspired poems by Alfred Tennyson (1809–92), William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) and W.H. Auden (1907–73), and more recently has provided the impetus behind work by poets such as Michael Longley (as you have seen) and Christopher Logue (b. 1926) – as well as the St Lucian poet and playwright Derek Walcott (b. 1930), whose poem *Omeros* has itself gained something of the status of a modern classic. To explain the considerable influence that Homeric poetry has enjoyed, it is evidently not enough simply to point to the fact that these epic poems are very old. So let us look at Homer's poetry in greater detail in an attempt to explain the place that the *Iliad* has traditionally occupied in the canon and why Homeric poetry has inspired – and continues to inspire – later generations.

3.4 The subject matter of the *Iliad*

Before looking at specific passages of the *Iliad*, it will be useful for you to gain an overview of the poem as a whole, so in this section I will focus on the plot and subject matter of the *Iliad*.

The poem is set during the Trojan War – a conflict which the ancient Greeks thought had taken place several hundred years before the *Iliad* was composed (the traditional date for the destruction of Troy is 1184 BCE). According to Greek legend this war had lasted for ten years, during which an assorted army of Greeks had laid siege to the ancient city of Troy before finally claiming victory. Troy is thought to correspond to the site of Hissarlik in modern-day Turkey – a town which, as modern archaeologists have discovered, met a violent end at roughly the time in question (*c.*1220 BCE).

Modern scholars may continue to debate the extent to which the Trojan War of myth was a historical reality, but for the ancient Greeks this was an important episode in their collective past. Indeed, the original audiences of the *Iliad* would have been familiar with a whole series of myths connected with the Trojan War, knowledge of which is taken for granted in the *Iliad*. These include how the war was caused by the abduction from Greece of Helen, wife of Menelaus, by Paris, the son of the Trojan king; how the Greek fleet sailed to Troy under the leadership of Agamemnon; and how Troy was eventually captured thanks to a trick (the giant wooden horse which the Trojans took into their city unaware that it contained a number of Greek warriors). But rather than tell the story of the Trojan War from beginning to end, the action of the poem spans only fifty days and focuses on just a handful of days' fighting. As we find out in the first two lines of the *Iliad*, the story is essentially that of the 'Wrath of Achilles' and its consequences: first, Achilles' anger at the arrogant behaviour of Agamemnon (who takes away a girl given to Achilles as a battle prize); then Achilles' withdrawal from the battle resulting in the losses suffered by the Greek forces; Patroclus' death at the hands of Hector; Achilles' return to battle; the death of Hector and the maltreatment of his corpse by Achilles; and finally, the Achilles–Priam episode.

The focus of the action in the *Iliad* is undoubtedly the fighting, and battle scenes take up a large amount of the narrative. The devastating and disruptive effect of war is a constant theme in the poem but, importantly, war is also a way for warriors on both sides to win honour

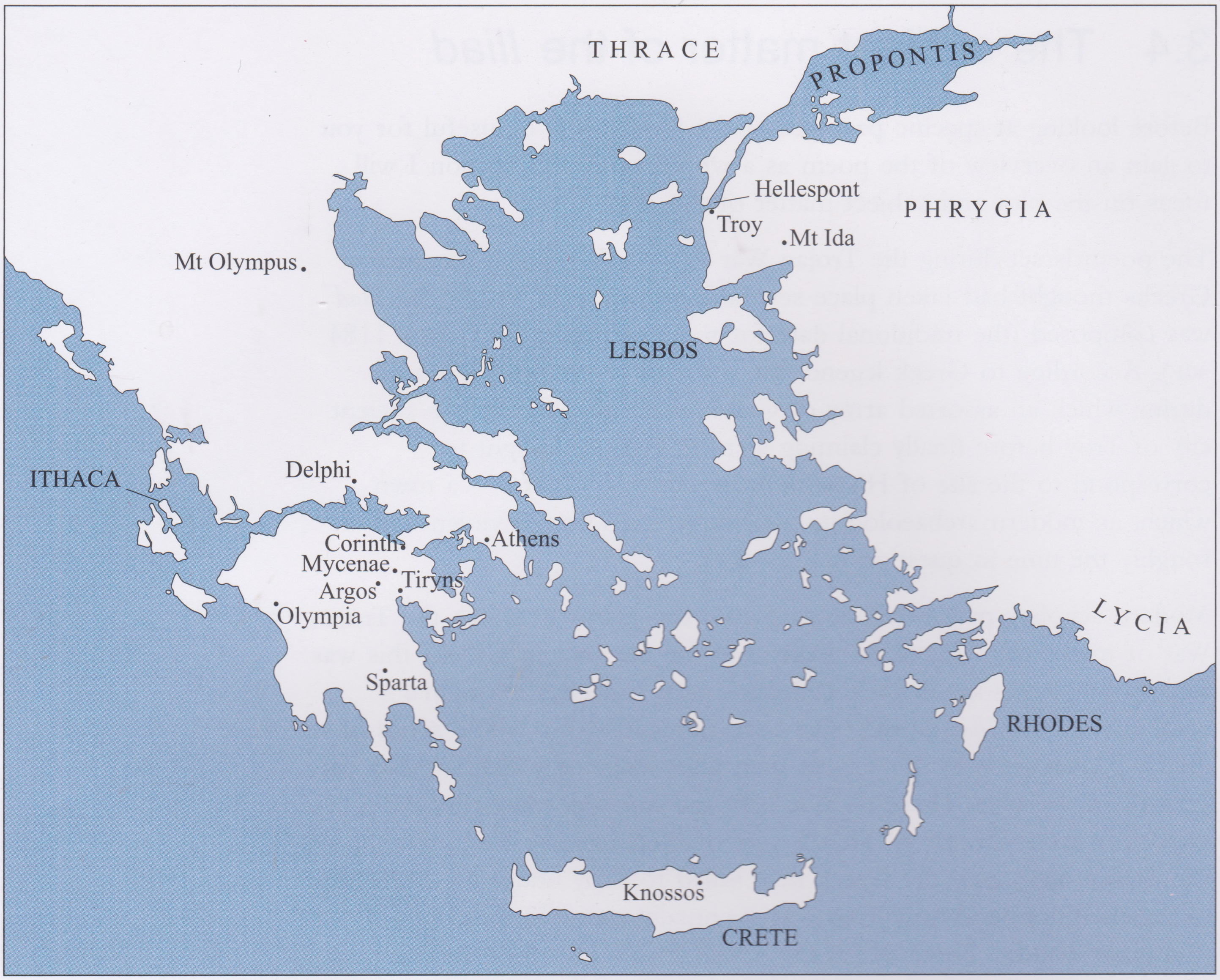
THRACE
PROPONTIS
Hellespont
PHRYGIA
Troy
Mt Ida
Mt Olympus
LESBOS
ITHACA
Delphi
Corinth
Athens
Mycenae
Tiryns
Argos
Olympia
LYCIA
Sparta
RHODES
Knossos
CRETE

Figure 3.3 Map of the Aegean in the late second millennium BCE.

and future glory (e.g. by killing others) and battle is presented as an engrossing spectacle in itself. Homeric society also has a clear pecking order: the central characters of the poem are not the ordinary soldiers but rather the elite Greek and Trojan leaders who, in this mythical past, are presented as stronger, braver and more beautiful than any men who have lived since. The ancient Greeks worshipped a whole series of major and minor deities: these gods, too, feature as characters in the poem and some, such as Athena and Apollo, play key roles in the fighting, weighing in on the side of either the Greeks or the Trojans. Fate also plays an important role in the poem: just as the original audience, through their familiarity with the relevant myths, would have known which of the heroes in the poem survived the war and which died at Troy, so are many heroes in the *Iliad* aware of the fate that will

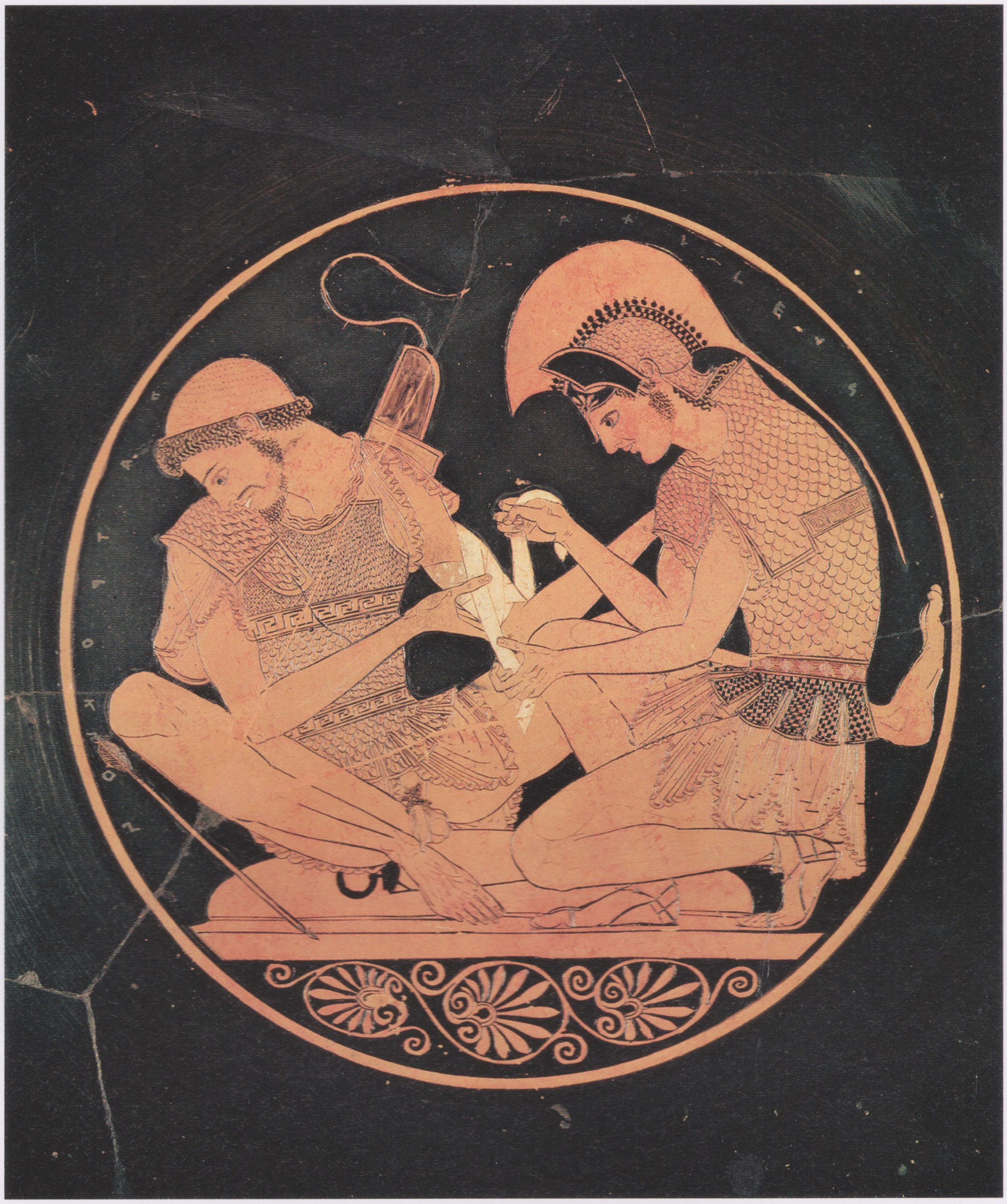

Figure 3.4 Achilles tending to Patroclus, who has been wounded by an arrow. Athenian red-figure *kylix* (drinking cup) by the Sosias painter, *c.*500 BCE, 20cm diameter. Found at Vulci. Staatliche Museen, Berlin, inv. F2278. Photo: © The Bridgeman Art Library.

befall them. And so, for example, part of the poignancy of the scene which you listened to earlier is that Achilles already knows that he is destined to die in battle and never to see his homeland and father again.

3.5 Book 22: Achilles and Hector

This activity should take you about 25 minutes.

Activity

You should now listen to a short extract from Book 22 of the *Iliad* (this comes two books prior to the Achilles–Priam episode you have already heard). You will find this extract on DVD 1; the recording lasts for just over 7 minutes. The extract describes the encounter between Achilles and Hector outside the walls of Troy when Hector's fate is sealed.

You should listen to the extract at least twice. First, listen to the recording all the way through, aiming simply to enjoy it as a piece of poetry. Then, once you have listened to the extract for the first time, turn to Reading 3.1. This contains the words of the extract as well as accompanying notes to help you with the proper names and other details with which you may not be familiar. You may find it useful to follow this text as you listen to the extract again. As you listen for the second time, try to answer the following questions (these pick up on points made in the discussion of the *Iliad* you have just read and also look forward to further work you will do on the poem):

1. What is the setting of the scene?
2. What are the activities mentioned in this extract which have no direct connection with war and/or the ongoing battle between Achilles and Hector?
3. Which gods play an active part in the events described? Whose side are they on (if any)?

Discussion

1. As befits a chase scene, the specific setting changes throughout the passage, though the location as a whole can neatly be summed up as 'under the walls of Troy' (line 181). The emphasis in this passage is often on movement: Hector's shaking (171) soon turns into a run and then we meet a flurry of verbs such as 'run', 'pursue', 'race' and 'dash', with all the time Hector's 'limbs working feverishly' (181). As Achilles pursues Hector, a number of sites they pass by are mentioned: the 'lookout' and 'wind-swept fig tree' (182); the 'wagon track' (183); and, in particular, the hot and cold springs (184–9) and the washing tubs (189–93).
2. The mention of the washing tubs forms the basis of a short digression about their use in peacetime. This is a place where the women of Troy used to linger to do their daily chores in a time before the Trojan plain had become a battleground: now it is a place past which men hurry in a life-and-death pursuit. This washing, then, is one arresting

example of an activity which in one sense has no direct connection with the Achilles and Hector episode, but which nevertheless provides a striking contrast to the ongoing action. You probably noted others. I found myself particularly struck by the **similes** of the falcon pursuing the pigeon (175–80: 'Just as a mountain falcon …') and the hound chasing the deer (234–9: 'Just as in the mountains …'), for example – two images associated with nature (the 'natural' violence of animals perhaps contrasting with the 'unnatural' violence of war?). I also noted the simile of the horse race (199–203: 'Just as some horses …') – an activity which presumably would have taken place outside the walls of Troy in times of peace, but which is now impossible for 'horse-taming Hector' to perform while the city is under siege (we shall look at these and other similes later). Zeus also comments on the sacrifices Hector *used* to make on Mount Ida (209–11) – and so here is another activity that is distanced from the present action both in place and time (presumably these sacrifices occurred before the war, when it was safe to leave the city). An added irony here is that the Trojans will hold games and sacrifices outside the walls of Troy after Hector's death (a detail you may recall from the extract you listened to from Book 24). Another counterpoint to the pursuit of Hector by Achilles comes in the form of the discussion between the gods: this takes place on Mount Olympus (the home of the gods), far away from the scene of battle – though of course the outcome of their ruminations will have a direct impact on the action.

3. The gods involved in this episode are Athena, Apollo and Zeus. Most of the gods who live on Olympus are partisan in the *Iliad*. Athena is on the side of the Greeks, for example, and so as a supporter of Achilles entreats Zeus not to spare Hector (220–5). Apollo, on the other hand, is on the Trojan side and so favours Hector, helping him to run faster (254) and only abandoning him when his fate is sealed (265). As the king of the gods, Zeus does not support any particular side in the *Iliad*, but rather intervenes sometimes on behalf of the Greeks, sometimes on behalf of the Trojans. Here he does pity Hector, but nevertheless allows Athena to intervene on Achilles' behalf. He later weighs the fates of the two heroes, thus condemning Hector to death (260–4).

This episode from Book 22 is one of the best known from the *Iliad* (which in itself raises interesting questions about whether some sections of famous works are more 'canonical' than others). Examining key scenes such as this allows you to deepen your knowledge of the poem and to familiarise yourself with some of the characteristic features of Homeric poetry (such as his use of speeches and digressions; the intervention of the gods in human affairs; and so on). One striking technique that Homer uses in this passage is to focus on an inanimate object, in this case the washing tubs. We see another example of this in the next passage you will look at, when Hector's plumed, shining helmet plays a central role in his encounter with his wife and son.

3.6 Book 6: Hector and Andromache

The final extract of the *Iliad* I would like you to focus on is taken from Book 6 and comes from earlier in the poem than the other extracts you study in this chapter (when Hector is still alive and well). The setting is the city of Troy itself and, unusually for the *Iliad*, Book 6 contains a number of female characters: the short scene you will study now, for example, details an encounter between Hector and his wife, Andromache.

The context is as follows. Hector has just been home but finds Andromache gone. He is told by his housekeeper, however, that 'she went to Ilion's great tower' to watch the fighting, as she has heard that the Trojans were in difficulty. When Hector finally meets up with his wife she is accompanied by her nurse and the couple's infant son, Astyanax.

Activity

This activity should take you about 30 minutes.

Listen to the recording of this extract from Book 6 of the *Iliad*, which can be found on DVD 1; the recording lasts approximately 10 minutes. You will find this part of the poem printed in Reading 3.2. As before, there are notes to help you with the proper names and other details.

When you have listened to the extract all the way through, consider the following question. In order to answer, you will need to listen to the extract a second time, or alternatively, you may choose to work with the printed text.

- With which characters (if any) do your sympathies lie, and why?

As you consider this question, remember to *collect evidence* for your response. Which lines contain important information? If you were preparing a short written answer to this question, which parts of the text might you choose to quote? You might also like to think about how the text shapes your opinion either in favour of or against Hector, Andromache and Astyanax.

Discussion

I hope you managed to make some headway with this question. Here is my response to compare with your own, although you may well, of course, have come up with different points from me, especially as the judgement I have asked you to make is a subjective one. Whatever conclusion you come to, the most important thing, however, is for you to be able to back up your points with reference to the text.

I shall start by looking at the character of Hector's wife, Andromache, who is portrayed as being in a highly emotional state in this passage (e.g. she runs to Hector at 483 and is described as weeping at 496 and 594). She is in this state of emotion because she is greatly concerned about her husband's fate: the reason why she has left the house, for example, is to watch the battle from the vantage point of one of Troy's high towers and she wastes no time in berating Hector when she first sees him for his 'warlike spirit' (498). As well as being emotional, she is certainly a pitiable character, too: we learn that her whole family has been wiped out by Achilles (507–26) and she is eager to avoid both the miserable fate that will befall her should Troy be captured (503–7) and the prospect of her son losing his father (529). But she is, I think, shown to be more than just a powerless, weeping wife: she also shows some practical knowledge of war when she advises Hector where to station troops (530–8). As a caring mother, who has suffered greatly, and feels great loyalty to her family, there is much to warm to in Andromache's character and, for my part, I certainly found her to be a sympathetic figure.

Hector is a more problematic figure, I think. The fact that he dismisses his wife's entreaties to stay in Troy rather than fight (539–47) might make him seem harsh, for example. But Hector is not without warmth, as is demonstrated when he holds his son and kisses him (581–2). The wish he then utters – that his son grow up to be not just strong and brave, but also the winner of 'bloody spoils' (590) – may well strike a modern reader as chilling, but it is also, I think, central to understanding Hector's character. Hector is earlier described as 'Troy's only guardian' (494) and what characterises him, in my view, is his sense of duty towards his people (indeed, at other points in the poem it is his sense of duty which leads him to carry on the fight rather than a love of battle). So Hector may be uncompromising and concerned with honour, but he is also loyal, brave and an impressive warrior (his comments at 540–7 are revealing here).

There are, of course, other minor figures that feature in this passage: the pitiable baby, Astyanax, who is frightened by his father's plumed helmet (577–8), as well as the nurse and other servants (who, typically in the *Iliad*, are cast into the background somewhat). But taken as a whole, I found the Trojans that we meet in Book 6 to be a fairly sympathetic bunch – all the more so, perhaps, because the named individuals all have their own distinct personalities (the episode of the helmet even serves to breathe life into Astyanax). And in a poem composed in Greek for consumption by Greek-speaking audiences the extent to which the audience is invited to sympathise with the Trojans is certainly noteworthy. The outcome of this war matters not just for the warriors fighting on the plain, but also for the inhabitants of the city of Troy for whom a Greek victory will spell complete and utter ruin.

One point that struck me about this passage is the way in which the characters talk about the future. On plenty of occasions in the *Iliad*, characters say that they do not know what the future holds: just before this passage, for instance, Hector says that he has no idea if he'll return to his family once he rejoins battle, and Andromache's plea to him not to stay in Troy and not to 'orphan your child and make me a widow' (529–30) only makes sense if his destiny is not fixed. If she were convinced that he was going to die, there would be little point in trying to resist fate. So in one sense there is everything to play for in war, but alongside this uncertainty as regards the future, there is also more than one mention of a fixed fate. Hector, for example, says that he 'knows the day is coming when sacred Ilion will be destroyed' (548–9) but that 'no man will throw me down to Hades before my destined time' (597–8). He also states that 'no one escapes his fate' (599).

Another intriguing aspect of the poem is that characters often talk about events that will (possibly) happen in the future and which the original audience, through their knowledge of myth, know will actually come to pass. In this passage, for example, Hector talks of his 'many noble brothers, who'll fall down in the dust, slaughtered' (554–5) and Andromache being led off as a slave (559). These reminders of the fate of Troy may well serve to increase the pathos of the scenes (and so the tender moment that Astyanax shares with his parents is all the more poignant if we recall that the eventual capture of Troy will also spell his doom – he is eventually tossed from Troy's walls by Achilles' son, Neoptolemus). For me, then, Homer manages to achieve quite a complex effect: if the Trojans all knew with certainty what fate had in store for them, then there would not be any dramatic tension – but they do not know, and so we see the battle through their eyes, with every day bringing the prospect of defeat or victory, and life and death hanging in the balance. In other words, the outcome of every moment of battle matters. However, Homer also manages to produce pathos by reminding his audience of what fate has in store for his characters: Hector's conversations with the various members of his family are to be among his last and the lives of the women we meet in Troy will soon be changed for ever.

3.7 Homeric similes

One notable feature of Homeric poetry – and one which, I think, is important to the theme of authority – is his similes. Similes are, of course, common in our everyday speech and are generally introduced by words such as 'like', 'as' and 'just as' ('quiet as a mouse', 'run like the wind', etc.). Homeric similes have some unusual characteristics, however. Consider the simile you met in Book 22 (lines 175–80), describing how Achilles chases Hector:

> Just as a mountain falcon, the fastest creature
> of all the ones which fly, swoops down easily
> on a trembling pigeon as it darts off in fear,
> the hawk speeding after it with piercing cries,
> heart driving it to seize the prey – in just that way
> Achilles in his fury raced ahead.

Perhaps the most noteworthy feature of Homeric similes is their sheer length. Rarely in everyday speech – or even in other forms of literature, for that matter – do we find similes as extended as these. Homeric similes have been much discussed by scholars of the *Iliad* and the purpose of this section is to allow you to think about them further.

This activity should take you about 30 minutes.

Activity

Reading 3.3 consists of a number of examples of Homeric similes. These are all taken from Book 13 of the *Iliad* where the Trojans are attacking the Greek ships. Read these now and, as you do so, consider the following questions:

1. The subject of these similes is largely the warriors – but to what kind of things are they compared? What major categories emerge?
2. What, if anything, do you think these similes add to the poem? How do they alter the reader/listener's perspective on the action?

Discussion

1. As you will no doubt have noticed, the bulk of the imagery in these similes is taken from the realm of nature. Animals feature heavily (a hawk, a boar and a bull, for example) as do natural phenomena (I counted three references to winds, plus one lightning bolt) and trees (an ash, an oak, a poplar and a pine). Aside from this, we also find a comparison to a 'pampered child', fire, a rolling boulder caught in a

torrent and, memorably, beans and peas bouncing off a shovel. So, while there are some odd ones out, certain themes recur.

Looking at these similes, I also noted that a lot of the images were connected with farming: we have the tending of sheep; the farmers' binding of the bull; the beans and peas on the threshing-room floor; and oxen ploughing a field. A number of the activities mentioned are communal, too: not just the binding of the bull, but also the felling of the tree ('by working men': 466) and the mob who chase the boar. Perhaps you noticed other patterns.

2 For me what is interesting about these similes is the way they provide a counterpoint to the main action. Many of the similes conjure up a world of peacetime activities, for example, and so, I think, serve to remind the audience of how life is lived outside wartime. Images of weather, dust clouds, torrents and boulders provide the listener with examples of natural phenomena, and these again serve to contrast with the man-made phenomenon of war. The pictures of rural life, mountains and the wilds that we are often presented with also contrast with the life to which the Trojans (and to a large extent the Greeks, too) are reduced, confined as they are to their city owing to the siege. Presumably, images of rural life and natural phenomena would also have been familiar to Homer's original audience and so these similes would have functioned as an important bridge between their world and that of the poem.

When looking at these similes, I also found myself thinking about the impression of war they give. Many of the images of rural life and farming may be seen as suggestive of a far gentler and more appealing existence as lived in peacetime and so, from one point of view, they could be said to underline the brutality of war. And other similes, too – such as those which concern the havoc wreaked by winds, water and fire – could also be said to highlight the destructive force of war. But from another point of view, Homeric similes serve to glorify war by underlining its spectacle. The Trojan War is so spectacular that, on the one hand, its effect can be compared to the most impressive forces of nature; and on the other, the scenes of rural life to which wartime activities are likened (ploughing, threshing, tending sheep) might reasonably be thought dull and everyday when compared to the memorable events taking place on the plain of Troy. This war is unique – so unique that each of these moments in the battle is sufficiently important to be recorded in an epic poem. The events to which they are compared, however, are generic: there will be countless examples in human history of winds rousing the sea, falling boulders, and oxen ploughing fields. And so war may be destructive, but I think these similes also help to suggest that it is impressive.

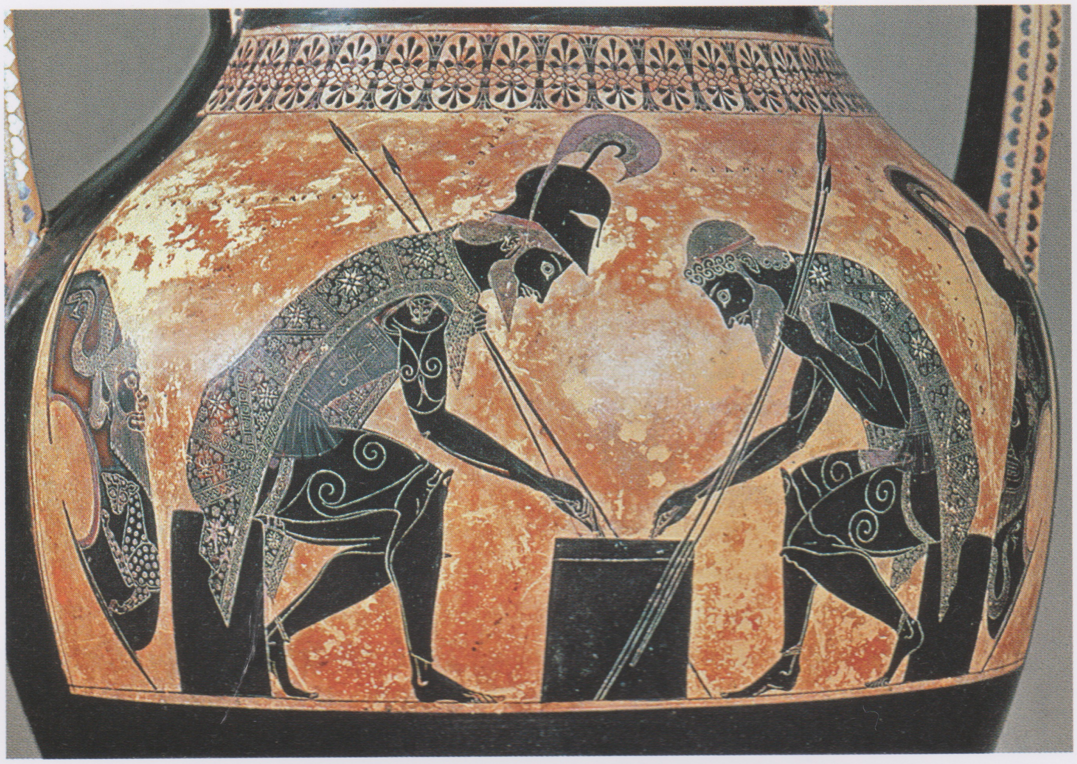

Figure 3.5 Achilles and Ajax, a fellow Greek warrior, playing a board game. Athenian black-figure belly amphora by Exekias from Vulci, *c.*550–530 BCE. Vatican Museums and Galleries 344 (ABV 145.13). Photo: © The Bridgeman Art Library.

A further point to make concerns the theme of this book: namely, authority. I would be inclined to argue that these extended similes help to lend the *Iliad* an air of authority since they are instrumental in persuading the audience that the poet has a detailed and subtle understanding of the events he is describing. After all, these similes give the impression that the poet knows what the war at Troy looked *like*, what people behaved *like*. Extended similes also betray a knowledge by the poet of other realms as well, beyond the scope of war (such as farming, nature, and so on). And so this helps to reinforce the impression we gain elsewhere that the poet's knowledge is vast: he is able to recount events in great detail and recite long speeches verbatim; and he is able to speak with knowledge about not only current events in the Greek camp, on the battlefield and in Troy, but also events that happen on Olympus among the gods. Nor is time a limiting factor: in the course of the narrative we learn about events that happened in the past (such as the way in which the washing tubs were once used outside

Troy) as well as future occurrences (such as the destruction of Troy and the fate of its various inhabitants). Events that happen the world over (not just at Troy); events which occur among men, gods and animals (many specific, some generic); events which are taken from the present, past and future: all fall within the poet's comprehension. Few authors' reach is as vast.

3.8 The authority of Homer

This activity should take you about 20 minutes.

Activity

At this point I would like you to take the opportunity to reflect on the work you have done on the *Iliad* by considering the following question.

- What would you say to someone who had never studied Homer before if they asked you why the *Iliad* is thought to be an important poem?

In answering this question, you should think about the reasons why Homer occupies the position he does in the literary canon (why do people consider Homer to be important? What evidence is there that the *Iliad* has been – and continues to be – thought important?). In addition, how can Homeric poetry be said to possess 'authority' (e.g. in terms of tone, subject matter, style, and so on)?

After you have collected your thoughts, you should make a short list of points in answer to this question. You may find it useful at this stage to look over some parts of this chapter again.

Discussion

I found this a tough question to answer in many ways. Certainly, I found some of the points that struck me easier to put into words than others. Here, however, is my attempt at a short list – and your points may well differ from mine.

- Age. The fact that the *Iliad* is the oldest surviving work of western literature gives it a ready-made status, I think. In a similar way, we might be interested in the oldest surviving house in a town, or the oldest surviving example of a wristwatch. And while, as you have seen, scholarly and popular conceptions of what works are considered 'canonical' are subject to variation over time, the *Iliad*'s position as 'first' does a good deal to safeguard its continued high status.
- Quality. I would argue that the quality of the poetry also makes the *Iliad* an important and canonical work, though I appreciate that this is a subjective judgement (albeit one that many critics have shared). The work that you have done on the *Iliad* in this chapter should mean that you are now in a position to make your own judgements about the quality of the poem.
- Status. The fact that so many generations have respected Homer is itself a compelling reason for us as modern readers to afford the *Iliad* a high status. For example, the *Iliad* was an important poem for the

Greeks of later generations (whose civilisation we also tend to hold in high regard). Homeric epic can also number 'great' authors among its imitators (the epics of Virgil and Milton are also regarded as 'classics'); the *Iliad* has been much translated and is still widely studied and read; and modern poets (such as Michael Longley, but also many others) still engage with and rework Homeric poetry. The regard that previous generations, as well as our own, have had for the *Iliad* provides a compelling reason to believe that it is an important work of art.

- Characters. The people of the *Iliad* are the great heroes of yesterday, figures immortalised in myth, stronger and more beautiful than those of the present day. The characters of the poem even include the gods. In a word, the central characters in the poem are 'important' figures in their society which makes it tempting to think, perhaps, that the poem is 'important' too (common soliders and servants barely feature in the poem, whereas the women who feature prominently in the poem tend to be the wives, lovers and mothers of heroes).
- Authorial knowledge. As discussed above, the author of the poem is highly informed: he displays detailed knowledge of the words and actions of Greeks, Trojans and gods alike; relates events that happen across the known world; and is equally knowledgeable about the past and future as he is about the present. The precision of detail and his powers of description (often in the form of similes) are also convincing evidence of the author's extensive overview. (Of course, in an ancient Greek context, Homer's superior knowledge would have been put down to the fact that he was divinely inspired by the goddess(es) of poetry, the Muse(s). There is an appeal to the Muse in the very first line of the *Iliad*: 'Sing, goddess, of the wrath of Achilles, son of Peleus …').

I considered other points, too. For example, how important is it that the *Iliad* comes from a culture (that of ancient Greece) which has traditionally been much admired? Or the fact that it touches on highly charged and 'important' issues like war and death? There are no doubt a whole host of other points to make, some of which you may well have come up with in your own answer.

I think this is an interesting exercise to perform in regard to any number of works of art (of literature, art, music, etc.), not least because it makes us think about the criteria we use when judging something's importance. When I was thinking about my reaction to Homeric poetry, for example, I realised at times that I was not always wholly comfortable with some of the unconscious assumptions that I was making (and that others routinely make, too), such as the idea that the *Iliad*'s authority partly stems from the fact it is populated by 'important' people (aren't common soldiers and women important, too?) or that tragic events are somehow more important than happy ones.

In the next chapter you will have the opportunity to consider the way in which classical texts possess authority from another angle, when you study *The Island* – a twentieth-century play which is based in part on a Greek tragedy: Sophocles' *Antigone.*

Conclusion

In this chapter you have made some important steps towards understanding Homeric poetry. You have also explored further the concepts of canon and authority, and have had a chance to develop your skills of close reading and close listening through your work on the poem 'Ceasefire' and extracts from the *Iliad*.

You have also gained experience of working with ancient Greek material (and its reconfiguration – or 'reception' – by a modern poet) and so have acquired an insight into what work in the discipline of Classical Studies involves. As outlined in the Introduction to this chapter, Classical Studies is a broad discipline which covers the study of not only ancient Greek culture, but also the world of ancient Rome. Important aspects of the discipline of Classical Studies have nevertheless been touched on, such as the incomplete nature of our sources (see the section on 'Homeric poetry and the literary canon'), the interdisciplinary nature of study (i.e. the fact that classicists often make use of different kinds of evidence – e.g. literary *and* archaeological – to build up a picture of the ancient world) and the interest that many classicists take in the way that material from the ancient world has been understood and refashioned by later thinkers and artists (such as by Longley in 'Ceasefire').

Your set work for this chapter is finished, but there are some additional optional activities for you to complete if you have time to spare.

Optional activities

Reading 3.4 consists of three further poems by Michael Longley, all of which are based on the extracts of the *Iliad* you have listened to and read in this chapter. 'War & Peace' describes the pursuit of Hector by Achilles in *Iliad* 22 and 'The Helmet' and 'The Parting' are based on the encounter between Hector and Andromache in *Iliad* 6. You may like to read these and consider the ways in which Longley has reworked these episodes from Homer's poem.

You may also like to listen to a short audio talk, 'Lapsed Classicist', by Michael Longley, on DVD 1. Here Longley discusses his relationship with Homer over the years. The recording includes a reading of 'Ceasefire' and some of Longley's other poems inspired by Homeric themes.

References

Longley, M. (2006) *Collected Poems*, London, Jonathan Cape.

Further reading

If you would like to take your work in this chapter further, you may find the following translations of Homer's epics and introductions to his poetry helpful:

Fagles, R. (trans.) (1991) *Homer: The Odyssey* (Intro. B. Knox), London, Penguin.

Gepraziosi, B. and Haubold, J. (2005) *Homer: The Resonance of Epic*, London, Duckworth.

Johnston, I. (trans.) (2006) *Homer: The Iliad* (2nd edn), Arlington, VA, Richer Resources Publications.

Lattimore, R. (trans.) (1961) *The Iliad of Homer*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press.

Shewring, W. (trans.) (1980) *Homer: The Odyssey* (Intro. G.S. Kirk), Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Silk, M.S. (1987) *Homer: The Iliad* (Landmarks of World Literature), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Readings

Note that in the passages of the *Iliad* the line numbers of the translation differ from those of the original Greek poem (which are given in brackets).

Reading 3.1: Homer's *Iliad* 22, lines 166–265 (Original Greek: 22.131–213)

But Achilles was coming closer, like Enyalius,[1]
the warrior god of battle with the shining helmet.
On his right shoulder he waved his dreadful spear
made of Pelian[2] ash. The bronze around him glittered
like a blazing fire or rising sun. At that moment,
as he watched, Hector began to shake in fear.
His courage gone, he could no longer stand there.
Terrified, he started running, leaving the gate.
Peleus' son[3] went after him, sure of his speed on foot.
Just as a mountain falcon, the fastest creature
of all the ones which fly, swoops down easily
on a trembling pigeon as it darts off in fear,
the hawk speeding after it with piercing cries,
heart driving it to seize the prey – in just that way
Achilles in his fury raced ahead. Hector ran
under the walls of Troy, limbs working feverishly.
They ran on past the lookout and the wind-swept fig tree,
some distance from the wall, along the wagon track.
They reached the two fair-flowing well springs
which feed swirling Scamander's[4] stream. From one of them
hot water flows, and out of it steam rises up,
as if there were a fire burning. From the other,
cold water comes, as cold as hail or freezing snow
or melting ice, even in summer. By these springs
stood wide tubs for washing, made of beautiful stone,

---

[1] **Enyalius**: another name for Ares, god of war.

[2] **Pelian**: Mount Pelion lies in mainland Greece in southern Thessaly: it takes its name from Achilles' father, Peleus.

[3] **Peleus' son**: i.e. Achilles.

[4] **Scamander**: a river flowing from Mount Ida to the Hellespont near the mouth of which the Greeks were encamped.

where, in peace time, before Achaea's[5] sons arrived,
Trojan wives and lovely daughters used to wash
their brightly coloured clothing. The men raced past there,
one in full flight, the other one pursuing him.
The man running off in front was a brave warrior,
but the man going after him was greater. They ran fast,
for this was no contest over sacrificial beasts,
the usual prizes for a race. They were competing
for horse-taming Hector's life. Just as some horses,
sure-footed, prize-winning creatures, make the turn
around the post and race quickly as they strive to win
some splendid prize – a tripod[6] or a woman
honouring a man that's died – that's how these two men raced,
going three times round Priam's city[7] on their sprinting feet.
All the gods looked on. Among them the first one to speak
was Zeus,[8] father of the gods and men:
'What a sight!
My eyes can see a fine man being pursued
around the walls. How my heart pities Hector,
who's often sacrificed to me, burning
many thighs of oxen on the crests
of Ida[9] with its many spurs and valleys,
on the city heights, as well. And now,
godlike Achilles is pursuing him
on his quick feet round Priam's city. Come,
you gods, think hard and offer your advice –
do we wish to rescue him from death,
or kill him now, for all his bravery,
at the hands of Peleus' son, Achilles?'

---

[5] **Achaea**: i.e. Greece: the Greeks in the *Iliad* are variously referred to as Achaeans, Argives and Danaans.

[6] **tripod**: a 'three-footed' metal support for mixing bowls, cauldrons, etc.

[7] **Priam's city**: i.e. Troy: Priam is father of Hector and king of Troy.

[8] **Zeus**: as befits his role as king of the gods, Zeus is neither pro-Greek (like his daughter, Athena), nor pro-Trojan, like Apollo, and so is able to provide arbitration between the warring sides. His overarching control extends even to the weather: at line 220 he is referred to as 'lord of lightning and dark clouds' and at line 226 as 'cloud-gatherer'.

[9] **Ida**: Mount Ida is located south-east of Troy and corresponds to the present-day Kaz Dağı in northern Turkey.

Then Athena,[10]
goddess with the glittering eyes, replied to Zeus:
'Father, lord of lightning and dark clouds,
what are you saying? How can you want
to snatch the man back from his wretched death.
He's mortal – his fate doomed him long ago.
Well, do as you wish, but we other gods
will not all approve your actions.'
Cloud-gatherer Zeus then answered Athena:
'Cheer up, Tritogeneia,[11] my dear child,
I'm not saying how my heart intends to act.
I want to please you. So you can do
whatever your mind tells you. Don't hold back.'
Athena, who was already eager, was spurred on
by Zeus' words. She rushed down from Olympus'[12] peak.
Swift Achilles was still pressing Hector hard
in that relentless chase. Just as in the mountains
a hound startles from its cover some young deer,
then goes after it through glens and valley gorges –
and even if the fawn evades it for a while,
cowering in some thicket, the dog tracks it down,
always running till he finds it – that's how Hector
could not shake off the swift-footed son of Peleus.
Every time he tried to dash for the Dardanian[13] gates
to get underneath the walls, so men on top
could come to his assistance by hurling spears,
Achilles would intercept him and turn him back
towards the plain, always making sure he kept
running a line between Hector and the city.
Like a dream in which a man cannot catch someone
who's running off and the other can't escape,
just as the first man can't catch up – that's how
Achilles, for all his speed, could not reach Hector,
while Hector was unable to evade Achilles.
But how could Hector have escaped death's fatal blow,

---

[10] **Athena**: a pro-Greek goddess: in the *Iliad* she stands for organised, disciplined warfare and often acts through heroes like Odysseus and Achilles.

[11] **Tritogeneia**: another name for Athena.

[12] **Olympus**: a mountain in north-west Greece and, in Greek mythology, home of the gods.

[13] **Dardanian**: i.e. Trojan: Dardanus was the son of Zeus and his grandson, Tros (the great-grandfather of Priam) was the ruler of Troy.

if Apollo[14] had not for one last time approached,
to give him strength and make his legs run faster?
Godlike Achilles, with a shake of his head,
prevented his own troops from shooting Hector
with their lethal weapons, in case some other man
hit Hector, robbed him of the glory, and left him
to come too late. But when they ran past those springs
the fourth time, Father Zeus raised his golden scales, 260
setting there two fatal lots for death's long sorrow,
one for Achilles, one for horse-taming Hector.
Seizing it in the middle, Zeus raised his balance.
Hector's fatal day sank, moving down to Hades.[15]
At once Phoebus[16] Apollo abandoned him.

Source: Johnston, I. (trans.) (2006) *Homer: The Iliad* (2nd edn), Arlington, VA, Richer Resources Publications, pp. 478–80; also available online at http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/homer/iliad22.htm (accessed 22 April 2010)

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[14] **Apollo** a pro-Trojan god: the archer-god, but also the god of disease and healing.
[15] **Hades**: the Greek underworld (abode of the god Hades).
[16] **Phoebus**: another name for Apollo (meaning 'Shining One').

Reading 3.2: Homer's *Iliad* 6, lines 480–613 (Original Greek: 6.390–502)

Hector left the house by the same route he'd come,
through the well-built streets, across the mighty city,
and reached the Scaean Gates,[17] beyond which he'd go
out onto the plain. There his wife ran up to meet him,
Andromache, daughter of great-hearted Eëtion,
who'd included a large dowry with her.
Eëtion had lived below forested Mount Placus,[18]
in Thebe,[19] king of the Cilician[20] people. She'd become
married wife to Hector of the shining helmet.
Now she met him there. With her came the nurse,
holding at her breast their happy infant child,
well-loved son of Hector, like a beautiful star.
Hector had named him Scamandrius,[21] but others
called him Astyanax, lord of the city,
because Hector was Troy's only guardian.
Hector looked at his son in silence, with a smile.
Andromache stood close to him, weeping.
Taking Hector by the hand, she spoke to him.
'My dear husband, your warlike spirit
will be your death. You've no compassion
for your infant child, for me, your sad wife,
who before long will be your widow.
For soon the Achaeans[22] will attack you,
all together, and cut you down. As for me,
it would be better, if I'm to lose you,
to be buried in the ground. For then I'll have
no other comfort, once you meet your death,
except my sorrow. I have no father,
no dear mother. For lord Achilles killed
my father, when he wiped out Thebe,
city with high gates, slaying Eëtion.
But he didn't strip his corpse – his heart

---

[17] **Scaean Gates**: the main gates of Troy, built by the god Poseidon.
[18] **Placus**: a spur of Mount Ida, south-east of Troy.
[19] **Thebe**: a city in Cilicia (see next note) sacked by Achilles.
[20] **Cilician**: Cilicia was a coastal region of southern Asia Minor.
[21] **Scamandrius**: a name deriving from the River Scamander which flowed near the city of Troy.
[22] **Achaeans**: i.e. the Greeks.

felt too much shame for that. So he burned him
in his finely decorated armour
and raised a burial mound above the ashes.
Mountain nymphs, daughters of aegis-bearing[23] Zeus,
planted elm trees all around his body.
I had seven brothers in my home.
All went down to Hades in a single day,
for swift-footed lord Achilles killed them all,
while they were guarding their shambling oxen 520
and their white shining sheep. As for my mother,
who ruled wooded Thebe-under-Placus,
he brought her here with all his other spoils.
Then he released her for a massive ransom.
But archer goddess Artemis then killed her
in her father's house. So, Hector, you are now
my father, noble mother, brother,
and my protecting husband. So pity me.
Stay here in this tower. Don't orphan your child
and make me a widow. Place men by the fig tree, 530
for there the city is most vulnerable,
the wall most easily scaled. Three times
their best men have come there to attack,
led by the two Ajaxes,[24] the sons of Atreus,[25]
famous Idomeneus,[26] and Diomedes,[27]
Tydeus' courageous son, incited to it
by someone well versed in prophecy
or by their own hearts' inclination.'
Great Hector of the shining helmet answered her:
'Wife,
all this concerns me, too. But I'd be disgraced, 540
dreadfully shamed among Trojan men
and Trojan women in their trailing gowns,
if I should, like a coward, slink away from war.
My heart will never prompt me to do that,
for I have learned always to be brave,

---

[23] **aegis**: a divine attribute of authority, represented in art as a large all-round bib with scales.

[24] **Ajaxes**: in the *Iliad* there are two Greek warriors named Ajax: one the son of Telamos and ruler of Salamis; the other the son of Oïleus and ruler of Locris.

[25] **the sons of Atreus**: i.e. Agamemnon (leader of the Greeks) and his brother Menelaus.

[26] **Idomeneus**: leader of the Cretan forces at Troy.

[27] **Diomedes**: king of Argos and one of the foremost Greek warriors.

to fight alongside Trojans at the front,
striving to win fame for father and myself.
My heart and mind know well the day is coming
when sacred Ilion will be destroyed,
along with Priam of the fine ash spear
and Priam's people. But what pains me most
about these future sorrows is not so much
the Trojans, Hecuba,[28] or king Priam,
or even my many noble brothers,
who'll fall down in the dust, slaughtered
by their enemies. My pain focuses on you,
when one of those bronze-clad Achaeans
leads you off in tears, ends your days of freedom.
If then you come to Argos[29] as a slave,
working the loom for some other woman,
fetching water from Hypereia[30] or Messeis,[31]
against your will, forced by powerful Fate,
then someone seeing you as you weep
may well say:
"That woman is Hector's wife.
He was the finest warrior in battle
of all horse-taming Trojans in that war
when they fought for Troy."
Someone will say that,
and it will bring still more grief to you,
to be without a man like that to save you
from days of servitude. May I lie dead,
hidden deep under a burial mound,
before I hear about your screaming,
as you are dragged away.'
With these words,
glorious Hector stretched his hands out for his son.
The boy immediately shrank back against the breast
of the finely girdled nurse, crying out in terror
to see his own dear father, scared at the sight of bronze,
the horse-hair plume nodding fearfully from his helmet top.
The child's loving father laughed, his noble mother, too.

---

[28] **Hecuba**: wife of Priam, mother of Hector and queen of Troy.

[29] **Argos**: a city in the Peloponnese, southern Greece: but perhaps 'Argos' here simply indicates 'Greece'.

[30] **Hypereia**: a spring in Thessaly (northern Greece).

[31] **Messeis**: a spring in either Thessaly or Therapne, near Sparta.

Glorious Hector pulled the glittering helmet off
and set it on the ground. Then he kissed his dear son
and held him in his arms. He prayed aloud to Zeus
and the rest of the immortals.
'Zeus, all you other gods,
grant that this child, my son, may become,
like me, pre-eminent among the Trojans,
as strong and brave as me. Grant that he may rule
Troy with strength. May people someday say,
as he returns from war, "This man is far better
than his father." May he carry back
bloody spoils from his slaughtered enemy,
making his mother's heart rejoice.'
He placed his son in the hands of his dear wife.
She embraced the child on her sweet breast, smiling
through her tears. Observing her, Hector felt compassion.
He took her hand, then spoke to her.
'My dearest wife,
don't let your heart be sad on my account.
No man will throw me down to Hades
before my destined time. I tell you this –
no one escapes his fate, not the coward,
nor the brave man, from the moment of his birth.
So you should go into the house, keep busy
with your proper work, with your loom and wool,
telling your servants to set about their tasks.
War will be every man's concern, especially mine,
of all those who live in Troy.'
Having said these words,
glorious Hector took his plumed helmet in his hands.
His beloved wife went home, often looking back,
as she went, crying bitterly. She quickly reached
the spacious home of Hector, killer of men.
Inside she met her many servants and bid them all lament.
So they mourned for Hector in his own house,
though he was still alive – they thought he'd not come back,
he'd not escape the battle fury of Achaean hands.

Source: Johnston, I. (trans.) (2006) *Homer: The Iliad* (2nd edn), Arlington, VA, Richer Resources Publications, pp. 135–9; also available online at http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/homer/iliad6.htm (accessed 22 April 2010)

Reading 3.3: Homer's *Iliad* 13: similes

Lines 69–72 (13.62–5 of original Greek)

Then Poseidon left. Just as a swift-winged hawk
takes off while hovering above some high sheer rock,
swooping down over the plain to hunt another bird –
that is how Earthshaker Poseidon went off then.

Lines 160–9 (13.136–45 of original Greek)

The Trojans came on in a mass, led by Hector,
always charging forward, like a rolling boulder,
which some river in a winter flood dislodges
from a cliff beside its banks, its great flood eroding
what supports that lethal stone. In its fall, it bounces –
woods crash underneath it, as it accelerates
in a straight line, unimpeded – then it hits the plain,
where, for all its impetus, its motion stops.
That's how Hector threatened then to smash his way
with ease down to the sea, to Achaea's huts and ships.

Lines 208–13 (13.178–81 of original Greek)

Teucer[32] pulled the weapon back. Imbrius[33] collapsed.
Just as an ash tree growing on a mountain top,
visible from every side, is chopped down by bronze,
its foliage crashing to the ground – that's how he fell.
His armour, finely decorated bronze, rang out,
reverberating round him.

Lines 280–6 (13.240–5 of original Greek)

Idomeneus[34]
went into his well-made hut, strapped fine armour
round his body, took two spears and then strode out,
looking like a lightning bolt which Cronos' son[35]
grips in his hand and hurls down from bright Olympus,

---

[32] **Teucer**: a Greek warrior, son of Telamon and half-brother of Ajax.
[33] **Imbrius**: a Trojan warrior, son-in-law to Priam.
[34] **Idomeneus**: leader of the Cretan forces at Troy.
[35] **Cronos' son**: i.e. Zeus.

revealing in its dazzling flash a sign for mortal men,
that's how, as he moved, bronze glinted on his chest.

Lines 395–9 (13.333–7 of original Greek)

By the ships' sterns both sides met in frantic battle.
Just as keen winds sometimes whip up gusts of air,
when dirt lies heavy on the roads, and stir up
all the dust into huge clouds – that's how this fight
gathered momentum then.

Lines 462–9 (13.387–93 of original Greek)

But Idomeneus was too quick for him.
He hit Asius[36] with a spear below his chin,
forcing the bronze straight through his neck. Asius fell.
Just as a mountain oak, poplar, or tall pine falls,
cut down by working men with freshly sharpened axes,
to make timbers for some ship, that's how Asius lay,
stretched out there before his chariot and horses,
gagging, his fingers clawing at the bloody dust.

Lines 552–63 (13.468–77 of original Greek)

Deïphobus[37] finished. His words stirred the heart
in Aeneas' chest. He strode off to face Idomeneus,
fiercely eager for this fight. But no fear gripped
Idomeneus, as if he were some pampered child.
He stood his ground. Just as a wild mountain boar,
trusting its own strength, stands firm against a mob,
a crowd of men who chase it in some lonely place,
with hair bristling along its back, its eyes lit up,
like fire, gnashing its teeth ferociously, eager
to toss dogs and men aside – that's just the way
the famous spearman Idomeneus stood then,
without backing off, as swift Aeneas[38] came at him.

[36] **Asius**: a leader of Trojan allies from the region of the Hellespont.
[37] **Deïphobus**: son of Priam and Hecuba.
[38] **Aeneas**: a Trojan warrior, son of Prince Anchises and the goddess Aphrodite.

Lines 579–87 (13.489–95 of original Greek)

Aeneas
called out to those companions he'd caught sight of –
Deïphobus, Paris,[39] and Agenor[40] – leaders,
just as he was, of those Trojan warriors.
Men came up behind them. Just as a flock of sheep
follows the ram from pasture to their water,
filling the shepherd's heart with joy, so Aeneas
was happy in his chest to see that band of soldiers
standing there around him.

Lines 671–6 (13.570–3 of original Greek)

When that spear struck Adamas,[41] he doubled up,
bent down over the spear, writhing like a bull
which farmers in the mountains bind with willow shoots
and drag along by force, against the creature's will.
That's how Adamas, once hit, twitched there for a while,
but not for long.

Lines 689–95 (13.586–92 of original Greek)

Priam's son[42] hit Menelaus[43] with his arrow –
on the front plate of his armour, in the chest.
The keen arrow bounded off. Just as black beans or peas
fly off a broad shovel on large threshing floors,
driven by the sharp wind or winnower's strength –
that's how the arrow point glanced off the breast plate,
then flew aside, away from glorious Menelaus.

Lines 827–35 (13.701–8 of original Greek)

Ajax, son of Oïleus,[44] would not move away
from Ajax, son of Telamon[45] – he fought beside him.
Just as in a meadow a pair of wine-dark oxen
strain with the same heart to pull a jointed plough,

---

[39] **Paris:** aka Alexander, son of Priam and Hecuba, and the Trojan husband of Helen.

[40] **Agenor**: a Trojan warrior.

[41] **Adamas**: a Trojan warrior.

[42] **Priam's son**: Helenus, twin brother of the prophetess Cassandra.

[43] **Menelaus**: Greek warrior: brother of Agamemnon; king of Sparta; and the Greek husband of Helen.

[44] **Ajax, son of Oïleus**: Greek warrior, the ruler of Salamis.

[45] **Ajax, son of Telamon**: Greek warrior, the ruler of Locris.

beads of sweat running from the bottom of their horns,
with nothing but a well-polished yoke between them,
as they labour down the furrows, till the plough
slices through the edges of the field – that's the way
the two Ajaxes stood together then, side by side.

Lines 932–9 (13.795–801 of original Greek)

Just like blasts of storming winds
striking the earth under Father Zeus' thunder,
then with a roar slicing into the sea, whipping up
a crowd of surging waves across a booming ocean,
with lines of arching foam, one following another –
that's how Trojans marched behind their leaders,
in a tight formation, one behind the other,
glittering in bronze.

Source: Johnston, I. (trans.) (2006) *Homer*: *The Iliad* (2nd edn), Arlington, VA, Richer Resources Publications, pp. 267–94; also available online at http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/homer/iliad13.htm (accessed 22 April 2010)

Reading 3.4: Three poems by Michael Longley

War & Peace

Achilles hunts down Hector like a sparrowhawk
Screeching after a horror-struck collared-dove
That flails just in front of her executioner, so
Hector strains under the walls of Troy to stay alive.
Past the windbent wild fig tree and the lookout
Post they both accelerate away from the town
Along a cart-track as far as double well-heads
That gush into the eddying Scamander, in one
Warm water steaming like smoke from a bonfire,
The other running cold as hailstones, snow water,
Handy for the laundry-cisterns carved out of stone
Where Trojan housewives and their pretty daughters
Used to rinse glistening clothes in the good old days,
On washdays before the Greek soldiers came to Troy.

The Helmet

When Shiny Hector reached out for his son, the wean[46]
Squirmed and buried his head between his nurse's breasts
And howled, terrorised by his father, by flashing bronze
And the nightmarish nodding of the horse-hair crest.

His daddy laughed, his mammy laughed, and his daddy
Took off the helmet and laid it on the ground to gleam,
Then kissed the babbie and dandled him in his arms and
Prayed that his son might grow up bloodier than him.

The Parting

He: 'Leave it to the big boys, Andromache.'
'Hector, my darling husband, och, och,'[47] she.

Source: Longley, M. (2006) *Collected Poems*, London, Jonathan Cape, pp. 225 and 226

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[46] **wean**: a Northern Irish word that refers to a young child ('wee one').
[47] **och**: a Northern Irish word, used to express exasperation or disapproval.

4 Remaking authority in South African drama: *The Island*

Lynda Prescott

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Aims

This chapter will:

- offer a further perspective on the theme of 'remaking authority' through study of an overtly political play that draws on a classical, canonical text
- help you to develop your skills in reading modern drama, paying attention to different voices, silences, non-verbal sounds, and physical elements
- develop your awareness of the performance history dimension of drama.

Materials you will need

- 'Moving on to A150' website

Introduction

At the start of the previous chapter you looked at a modern poem by Michael Longley that reworks a famous moment from Homer's *Iliad*. James Robson's discussion showed how the 1990s Irish political and social context of Longley's poem combines with the mythical past of Homer's epic, illuminating the 'themes of death, grief, empathy and the painful realities of coming to terms with one's (former) enemies' (Chapter 3, Section 3.1). In this chapter you will continue to investigate the reworking of ancient Greek texts in the modern world, but this time the focus shifts to South Africa, during the period of apartheid, and to a different form of literature: drama. Through studying the play *The Island*, you will again see how an ancient, canonical text (Sophocles' play *Antigone*) has been reworked in a modern context to combine powerful new meanings with the essential elements of the original text.

Apartheid

Originally coined in the 1930s, the term 'apartheid' literally means 'apartness'. The word belongs to the language known as Afrikaans, a modified form of Dutch, and one of two European languages (the other being English) used by European settlers in South Africa. Over the course of several centuries, the Afrikaans-speakers, or Afrikaners, established themselves as a powerful minority, exercising control of South Africa's government. The predominantly Afrikaner National Party began using the term 'apartheid' from the early 1940s to describe a social system of racial segregation, and from 1948, when the National Party narrowly defeated more moderate interests in the country's elections, apartheid became enshrined in South Africa's laws. The 1949 Population Registration Act assigned every South African to a racial group: white, black, Asian or coloured (that is, of mixed race), and restrictions were established as to where different races could live and work. From 1952 onwards new, tighter '**pass laws**' meant that all non-whites were required to carry identity documents (passbooks) showing their racial group and the areas they were allowed to go to, for both residence and employment. Enforcing these laws entailed heavy policing and repression of the non-white majority.

Resistance to apartheid took many political forms, but the African National Congress (ANC), founded in 1912, was an especially prominent force. One of its leaders, Nelson Mandela, a young black lawyer, was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1964, but continued to inspire black Africans from his prison cell on the notorious Robben Island until his release in 1990. Apartheid was gradually dismantled under the leadership of the Nationalist party's F.W. de Klerk, and in 1994 Mandela was elected as South Africa's first black president, heading a government of national unity. Mandela and de Klerk shared the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993 'for their work for the peaceful termination of the apartheid regime, and for laying the foundations for a new democratic South Africa' (The Nobel Foundation, 1993).

4.1 Introducing *The Island*

An overview of Sophocles' *Antigone*

Sophocles was one of the most famous dramatists of ancient Greece and was born near Athens at the start of the fifth century BCE. His three plays derived from the myth of Oedipus and his family (*King Oedipus*, *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Antigone*) occupy an important place in the canon of western drama. *Antigone*, in particular, has been a potent text for actors and theatre directors all around the world, the tragic figure of Antigone, daughter of Oedipus, standing as an example of heroic resistance against the forces of oppression. Eileen Battersby, in her article 'A Greek tragedy for our times', describes *Antigone* as 'a foundation text of European theatre' (2004, p. 55), but there have been many productions in various languages and cultures outside of Europe, too.

You can read part of Eileen Battersby's article on the 'Moving on to A150' website.

Africa has generated its fair share of *Antigone*s, although the South African play we have chosen for you to study here is not a direct adaptation of Sophocles' play. Instead, *The Island* contains parts of Sophocles' drama as a play-within-a-play, and although you will come across some explanations of the plot of *Antigone* as you read *The Island,* you will probably find it easier to follow the play if you know the outlines of the *Antigone* story.

Activity

If you have studied AA100 *The arts past and present*, you will already be familiar with a modern adaptation of *Antigone*: *The Burial at Thebes* by Seamus Heaney (b. 1939). However, since *The Island* presents only sections from Sophocles' play, you may want to refresh your memory of the plot of *Antigone*. You will find a short outline of the play on the 'Moving on to A150' website. If you have not studied AA100, nor read the play in any other form, you should access and read this synopsis now.

Performing *Antigone*: the Serpent Players

There is a rather dramatic back-story behind the play you are about to study, and it begins in June 1965, when some amateur actors from New Brighton, a black township near Port Elizabeth on South Africa's Eastern Cape coast, were rehearsing a production of Sophocles' *Antigone*. Three days before the first performance, the actor playing Haemon, King Creon's son, was arrested. At this period of South Africa's history there was nothing unusual about such an arrest: the actors in the New Brighton group, the Serpent Players, were all black, and so subject to the draconian restrictions of racial segregation or apartheid, described above. Police surveillance and arrest were commonplace, with offenders of pass laws being cursorily tried in 'Native Commissioner's Courts' and then, more often than not, jailed. The prisoners considered to pose most political risk were sent to an off-shore jail in Table Bay, near Cape Town, called Robben Island. This was the destination of Norman Ntshinga, who would have been the Serpent Players' Haemon; other prisoners on Robben Island at the time included members of the banned ANC, including Nelson Mandela.

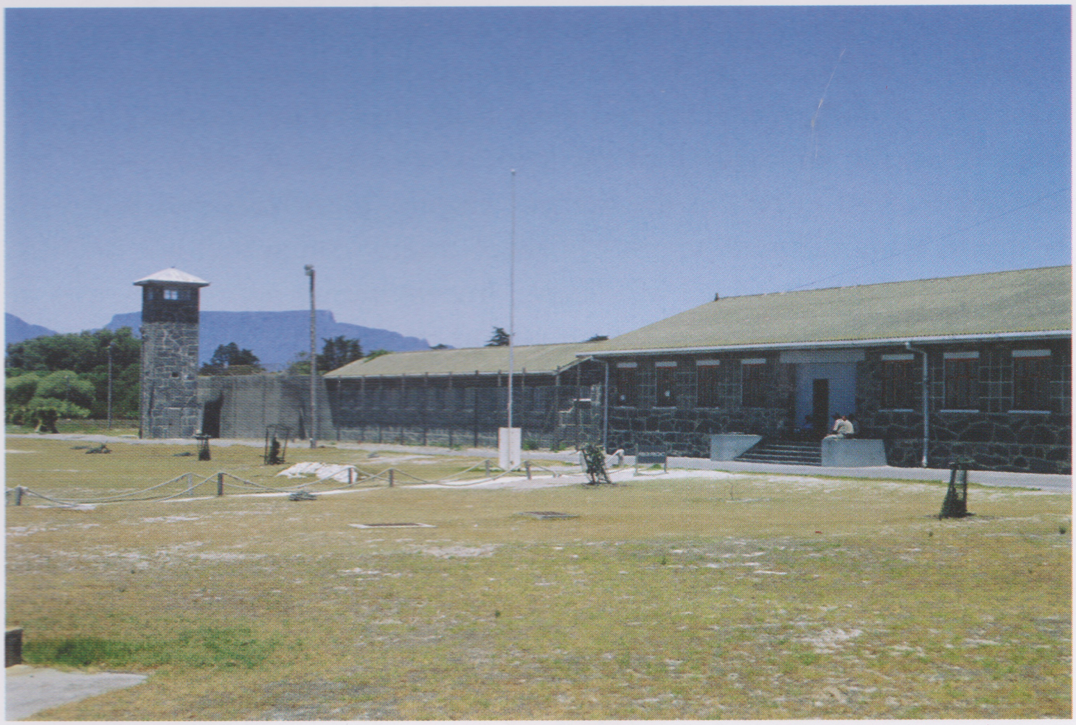

Figure 4.1 Robben Island Prison, Cape Town, South Africa. Photographed by Fraser Hall. Photo: © Robert Harding World Imagery/Fraser Hall/Getty Images.

The Serpent Players' production of *Antigone* went ahead, with John Kani taking over the role of Haemon. As it happened, Kani's brother was also a prisoner on Robben Island, and in his letters he reported that Sophocles' play had found a new audience in the island prison. Ntshinga and another imprisoned Player, Sipho 'Sharkey' Mguqulwa, arranged a two-man version of *Antigone* as part of a prison entertainment, 'on the basis of their memory of the play they were to have done when they were arrested' (Fugard, 1993, p. xxviii). This was not a unique event: in 1970, at a Christmas concert in the prison, there would be a fuller version of *Antigone* with Nelson Mandela playing the part of Creon (Mandela, 1994, p. 540).

You can read a short account of Nelson Mandela's experience of playing Creon on the 'Moving on to A150' website.

Meanwhile, the depleted Serpent Players were beginning to branch out from their repertoire of western classical drama. One thing that certainly *was* unusual about this theatre group was their connection with a white playwright and director, Athol Fugard, who lived in Port Elizabeth, and, despite the laws insisting on segregation in the theatre, had worked with the Serpent Players from 1963. After directing adaptations of modern as well as ancient drama with the Players, Fugard began workshop improvisations with members of the group that took them in quite new directions. He was influenced by his reading of *Towards a Poor Theatre*, by the Polish theatre director and innovator Jerzy Grotowski (1968), which steered away from theatre as 'spectacle' and emphasised the importance of the actor as a creator as much as an interpreter. And in two of the Serpent Players, John Kani and Winston Ntshona, Fugard found actors who were utterly committed not only to acting but also to the kind of creative, improvisatory approaches that he was keen to develop. The most significant products of this collaboration were two plays that now, when published, bear on their title page not the name of a single author but the words 'Devised by Athol Fugard, John Kani and Winston Ntshona.'

Staging *The Island*: finding a performance space and an audience

The first of these collaborative plays devised by Fugard, Kani and Ntshona, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, is based on the idea of a rural migrant worker taking the passbook of a dead man in order to continue working in Port Elizabeth. The play was first performed in Cape Town, at a theatre called The Space, in October 1972. The Space, which was actually a converted warehouse, had been established earlier that year by Brian Astbury, a theatre photographer, and his wife Yvonne Bryceland, an actress who worked closely with Fugard. Having been set up as a 'club', the theatre managed to evade the censorship that might otherwise have prevented a politically provocative play like *Sizwe Bansi* seeing the light of day. It also managed to attract audiences that were diverse in terms of both race and class. Although anti-apartheid theatre was emerging as a powerful force across the country – the South African Black Theatre Union was set up in July 1972 in Durban – plays performed at The Space reached a public that was, according to one American academic, 'more diverse than the audience for Black Consciousness Movement drama, and more vocally dissident than the audience for "western" theatrical experiments' (Kruger, 1999, p. 165).

The Space was also the venue at which the second Fugard/Kani/Ntshona play, now known as *The Island*, was performed. The germ of the play was that two-man version of *Antigone* enacted by the real-life imprisoned Serpent Players on Robben Island, mentioned above. However, this subject was even more politically sensitive than that of *Sizwe Bansi*, since it dealt with prison conditions, a topic surrounded by legal prohibitions. So for its first performance in July 1973, the play was disguised under the title *Die Hodoshe Span* ('Hodoshe' being the name given to one of the prison warders in the play, and 'span' referring to his 'work team'). At the time of this first performance the play still did not exist in written form. It was directed by Fugard, and the actors, Kani and Ntshona playing the parts of 'John' and 'Winston', relied on the improvisations they had developed in two weeks of intensive workshops with Fugard in order to present this play with another play enclosed inside it. So, strikingly for our purposes, this is a 'text' that, at its first public appearance, was not written down, although it relied, in places, on a translation of Sophocles' written text. And, as you will now see, it is also a play that begins without voices.

4.2 Reading *The Island*

Although the ideal way to approach a play is to see it in performance, the academic study of drama often involves simply reading the text on the page. *The Island* is quite a short play, and the full text, along with some explanatory notes, has been reproduced for you as Reading 4.1. (Note that the page references given for the play in this chapter refer to this reading.) You may choose to read the play now from beginning to end, or to read it in sections as you work through the activities and discussions below. If you opt to read the whole play now, I recommend that you read the relevant scenes again while carrying out the activities in this section.

If you have studied AA100 and read *Doctor Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe (1564–93), you will quickly notice that the experience of reading a modern play is very different. A play like *Dr Faustus*, besides being written in **blank verse**, includes very few direct indications as to what is actually happening on the stage. In a modern play, besides the differences in language, there are often copious stage directions. Often these italicised directions are as important as the words spoken by the play's characters, and our first activity focuses closely on the opening stage directions that lead us into the play.

This activity should take you about 15 minutes.

Activity

Read (or reread) the opening stage directions of the play at the beginning of Reading 4.1. They are exceptionally long and on stage the mime described in the second paragraph (beginning 'The long drawn-out wail …') can last for several minutes. As you read, try to visualise John's and Winston's movements. Then select one or two words and phrases from the text of the stage directions to answer the following questions:

1 What does the opening sand-digging mime say about the life of prisoners on Robben Island?

2 How does the mood change once the men are back inside their cell?

3 Although there are no spoken words in this opening, a number of sounds are indicated: what are they?

Discussion

1 The stage directions are fairly explicit about what the opening mime is meant to convey: 'an image of back-breaking and grotesquely futile labour'. Although the audience cannot, of course, see the piles of sand that 'never diminish', if the mime is skilfully done the

self-defeating nature of the two-handed digging-and-emptying becomes apparent. You might also have noted that this labour is described as 'interminable'; on stage, even a few minutes spent on repetitive movements like these can seem to stretch out for a long time, so the audience soon feels the tedium of the prisoners' existence. However, the pace changes with the next phase of the mime, the degrading three-legged run back to the cell, with beatings thrown in.

2. Once back in the cell (the central raised area described at the beginning of the stage directions), the prisoners can give in to 'total exhaustion'. However, Winston soon begins to express his sense of 'anger and outrage', so in answer to this question you might have selected stage directions relating to both elements of this mood change.
3. Exhaustion can easily be expressed through silence, but we can imagine this silence broken by Winston's soft moaning, building up gradually to the out-and-out 'noise' of rage. Besides these inarticulate sounds, and the men's earlier 'grunts' during the digging mime, you probably noted the external sounds of the opening siren and the whistle that marks the end of the digging – sharp, intrusive noises representing the invisible powers of those who control the prisoners' existence. Less strident but still unpleasant sounds mentioned at the end of the second paragraph are 'the squeal of the wheelbarrows' and 'the hum of Hodoshe, the green carrion fly': the full significance of 'Hodoshe' will only become apparent as the play goes on.

Scene 1: memory and imagination

During the opening mime we form our first impressions of the characters, John and Winston, and begin to appreciate the importance of the relationship between them. We know from the cast list that these two black prisoners are the only characters to appear in the play. The white warder, whom they call 'Hodoshe', remains off-stage and invisible. In fact, the whole superstructure of state authority, as represented in the prison setting, is revealed to the audience only by indirect means. We have already noted the siren and whistle in the opening mime, but as the play continues we will also begin to understand more about how the prison regime operates, not just through physical brutality but also through raising and then destroying prisoners' hopes; we learn all this through the dialogue between John and Winston. As the opening scene moves from mime into speech we quickly develop a sense of the

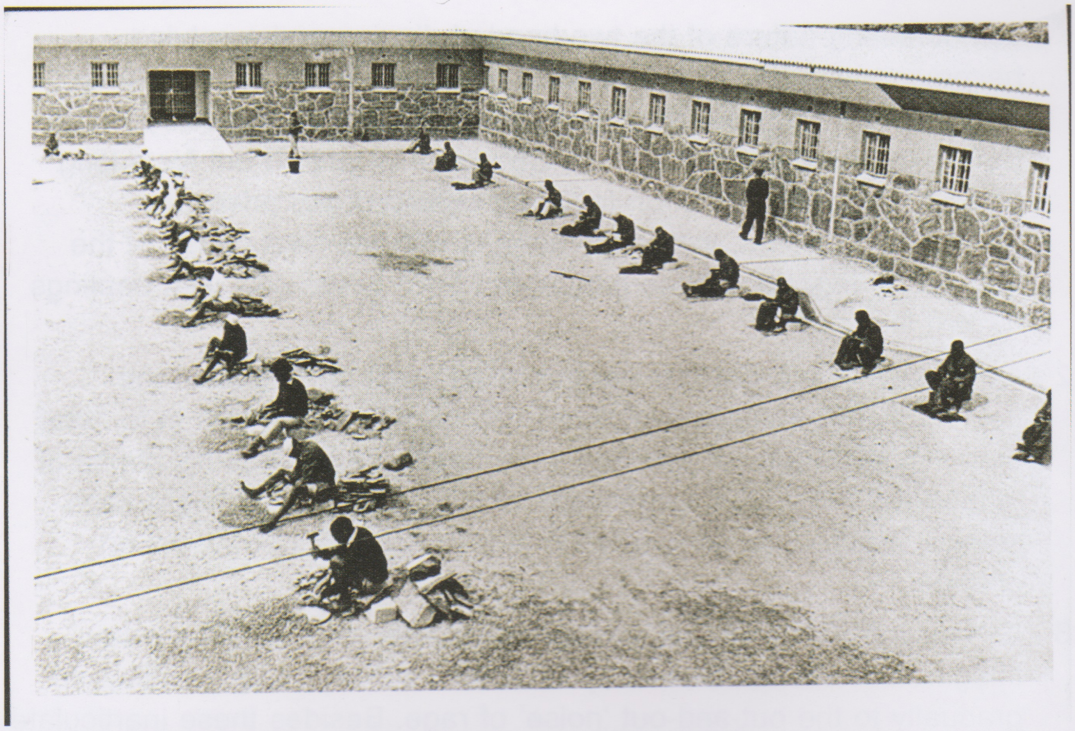

Figure 4.2 'Breaking Rock', 1966. Photographed by Cloete Breytenbach. Photo: © Cloete Breytenbach/UWC-Robben Island Museum Mayibuye Archives. This photograph was taken during a press visit organised by the South African government. The photo shoot was staged.

characters' individuality as well as of the ever-shifting relationship between them.

This activity should take you about an hour.

Activity

Read (or reread) the whole of Scene 1 (the longest in the play) in Reading 4.1, referring to the notes when you come across non-English words. (Two other languages feature prominently in the play: there is the European Afrikaans, mentioned in the text box on apartheid, and the African Xhosa.) As you read, make brief notes on the characters John and Winston, identifying points of difference between them, as well as shared characteristics.

The use of these two languages in the play is discussed in more detail in Book 2, Chapter 1.

Discussion

At the end of the opening mime we saw that Winston was filled with uncontrollable rage and John was trying to placate him. This continues when the dialogue begins, with Winston calling angrily for Hodoshe and John persuading him to be quiet. But there is a quick 'reversal of earlier roles' (p. 175) as Winston tends to John's injured ear, so here, right at the start of the play, the idea of brotherhood and mutual support is established. This is reinforced by Winston's utterance of the Xhosa rallying cry, *Nyana we Sizwe!* ('Son of the Land!' or 'Brother!'), and their sharing of memories about St George's Strand. You might also have noted John's attempt to amuse Winston with his invented 'News bulletin and weather forecast' (p. 176), an example of his readiness to break into mimicry and improvisation. As the scene progresses, you may have become more aware of John's enthusiasm for the play-acting plan he has committed himself and Winston to, and his determination to make Winston learn his part. So even in this first part of the dialogue our understanding of the two characters is becoming richer and fuller. You may well have noted other points, especially as the scene progresses. As you built up your picture of the two characters, you may also have found yourself reflecting on the relationship between them and the way they use this relationship for survival.

In looking at the first part of the play's dialogue we have already touched on the two concepts mentioned in the heading for this section: memory (here, of the seaside) and imagination (John's 'news bulletin'). These two concepts are especially important at this point in the play since both these qualities enable the men to move beyond the present moment: the sharing of memories and imaginative projections is an important part of their survival strategies.

Activity

This activity should take you about 15 minutes.

Look back through Scene 1 again, noting when John and Winston 'take themselves out' of their prison cell through the exercise of imagination.

Discussion

There are several possibilities you may have noted here, including John's and Winston's nightly ritual of entertaining each other with recreations of favourite movies (p. 184), and John's one-sided telephone conversation with 'Scott' and 'Sky' in a **shebeen** back home in New Brighton, using just an empty mug as a prop (pp. 184–6). These examples involve a dramatic element, and we see how much John, in particular, relishes acting. So it seems almost natural that while other prisoners are rehearsing songs or practising the Zulu War Dance for the prison concert (p. 179), John should be persuading Winston to join him in a piece of drama. We may be initially surprised at their material, *The Trial of Antigone*, but, as you have seen, this is actually a historically authentic choice; even had we not known this, John validates the Sophocles connection by recalling for Winston the 1965 New Brighton production of the play (p. 181). As he imitates 'Georgie', 'Mulligan' and 'Nomhle' in their various roles, John's re-enactment grounds Sophocles' play firmly in the everyday life that he and Winston had known before their incarceration. And his efforts clearly galvanise Winston, who, after much reluctance, declares that he has memorised the plot of the play (p. 182). Already, then, there are suggestions that imagination, exercised here through both formal and informal acting, can have a transformative power.

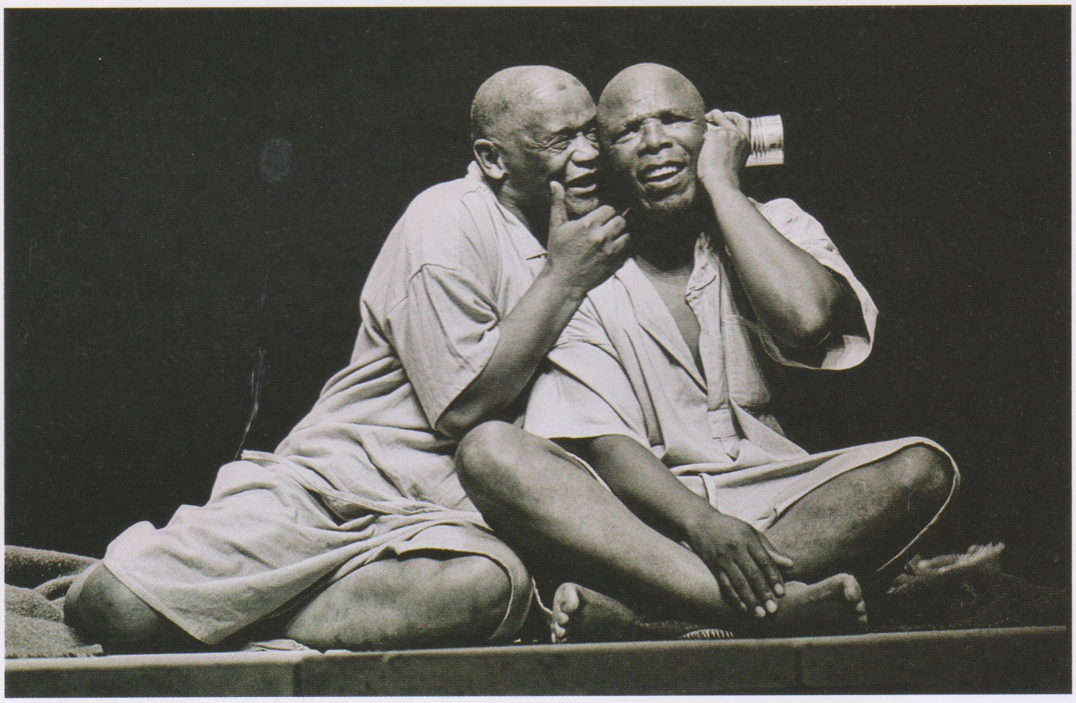

Figure 4.3 John Kani and Winston Ntshona 'phoning home' in a 1995 revival of *The Island* at the Market Theatre, Johannesburg, South Africa. Photographed by Ruphin Coudyzer. Photo: © Ruphin Coudyzer FPPSA – www.ruphin.com.

Looking back over this first scene as a whole, we can hardly fail to notice the ever-changing mood of the play, inviting a corresponding range of responses from the audience. In the theatre, with the constant visible reminder of the constraints of the prison cell (a tiny floor-space), the audience would be conscious of the men's ingenuity in surmounting the horror of the prison's inhuman conditions. But John's closing words, 'Tell her also … it's starting to get cold now, but the worst is still coming' (p. 186), remind us that the dominant mode of the play is tragedy.

Scenes 2 and 3: imprisonment and the meaning of freedom

The next two scenes of the play are set a few days later, both on the same night, so we will consider these two scenes together.

Activity

This activity should take you about one and a half hours.

Read (or reread) Scenes 2 and 3 in Reading 4.1. Then jot down some responses to the following questions:

1 What major ideas, or themes, are being brought to the audience's attention?

2 What actually happens in the course of these two scenes?

Discussion

1 It would be difficult to consider these scenes without reflecting on the ideas presented in the heading for this section. To be imprisoned for political reasons under desperately inhumane conditions, as John and Winston are, is to be condemned to a kind of living death. In Winston's case, serving out a life sentence, the contradictions implied in the idea of a living death are sharpened to the point of absurdity (I'm thinking here of the most serious senses of 'absurd' – illogical, meaningless, or, in the words of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'out of harmony with reason or propriety'). But for John, receiving news that his sentence has been commuted, the idea of freedom suddenly comes tantalisingly close; being a free man again will mean not only the restoration of identity, dignity, and choice, but also escaping the fate of someone like 'Old Harry' who has been turned 'into stone' by the prison regime (p. 199).

Another major theme you may have homed in on concerns the nature and purpose of drama. This theme surfaces in comic mode at the beginning of Scene 2, when we see Winston in his ludicrous Antigone 'costume', but John soon urges him to 'try to understand, man, … this is Theatre' (p. 188): the laughter they anticipate from the prison audience will be followed by the moment 'when our Antigone hits them with her words' (p. 188). Winston is not yet convinced, and in a central speech in Scene 2 (p. 189) he questions the uses of what is, in effect, dramatic fiction in a situation like his, so horribly hemmed in by reality:

> Only last night you tell me that this Antigone is a bloody … what you call it … legend! A Greek one at that. Bloody thing never even happened. Not even history! Look, brother, I got no time for bullshit. Fuck legends. Me?

Winston is really the character to watch, as he tests out his own limitations, particularly in having to dress and think like a woman, and we do, I think, see him change during the course of the play. At this point he is simply goaded by John's response, which asserts the importance of playing *Antigone* as a way of expressing their convictions, their ideals, in the face of oppression. In fact, John's position has a great weight of theatre history behind it. As I pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, the character of Antigone stands as a symbol of heroic resistance; thus, Sophocles' play has often been used to give voice to resistance at moments of political crisis. A canonical work of European culture, *Antigone* shares in the kind of authoritative status that, as you saw in the last chapter, ancient Greek texts often embody. Even a fragmentary amateur version of *Antigone*, such as John and Winston's, borrows and builds on the authority of Sophocles' play, reworking it for an entirely different context from that of the original. Of course, an academic explanation like this is one thing, but the experience of watching a character like Winston grow into the role of Antigone is another thing altogether. This growth is closer to the surface than in many plays, since Winston and John to some extent play themselves, notably through using their own names, and although neither Kani nor Ntshona experienced imprisonment on Robben Island, they were certainly close to people who did, and, as actors, they 'stand in' for those people.

2 Your answer to the question of what actually happens may have been quite brief. We see Winston dressing up, and the ensuing quarrel is arguably an 'event', but probably, if we were to summarise the action of the play, we would consider John's news of his sentence being reduced to be the most significant thing that happens in these two scenes. You probably noticed, though, that this news is delivered off-stage: the audience does not witness the dramatic moment of the prison governor's announcement. And later, as John reflects on the tactics of the prison authorities at the end of the play – 'the whole bloody thing is most probably a trick anyway' (p. 195) – we too may begin to ask whether this has been the life-transforming event that it seems at first to be, or whether it is a cruel kind of pretence.

In thinking more generally about the balance between the two elements we've been considering – themes and events – you've probably come to realise that, at the level of plot, the whole action of the play so far could be summed up fairly briefly. The chain of events the audience needs to understand in order to make sense of *The Island* has mostly been completed before the play opens: the story of how John and Winston came to be incarcerated in a notorious jail is treated only retrospectively. No great discoveries or revelations occur during the course of the play, but, as you will see in the next section, there is a dramatic climax in Scene 4. Even the events in the story of Antigone – the second level of narrative within the play – are pared down to the formal trial (see pp. 201–6), focusing attention on the conflict between the individual and the state. Like many modern plays, *The Island* is not overly concerned with telling a story, but neither is it an abstract debate about political or aesthetic issues. Rather, the major questions that arise during the play surface directly through the exploration of characters and their situations. And despite the absence of scenery, props, and other devices geared towards theatrical illusion, the play is firmly grounded in the physical realities of life in the island prison.

Scene 4: performing *Antigone*

Activity

This activity should take you about 40 minutes.

Now read (or reread) the final scene, paying attention to the opening stage directions and the use of language.

1. How might an actual theatre audience be positioned in relation to the imaginary prison audience?
2. How does the characters' speech differ in this scene from the way they speak in earlier scenes?

Discussion

1. It is in this final scene that we see how closely the classical drama of *Antigone*, in all its power and solemnity, is woven together with the fate of black South Africans suffering under apartheid. The congruence is achieved very simply, by converting the central cell area into a stage, complete with blanket backdrop, on which John appears first as a kind of Master of Ceremonies, introducing the play, and then as Creon confronting Winston's Antigone. This means that when John addresses 'Captain Prinsloo, Hodoshe, Warders, … and Gentlemen' (you may have noted the significant pause before the prisoners are addressed as 'gentlemen'), he is actually speaking straight to the theatre audience. As the real-life audience takes on the role of prison audience, then, it finds itself involved very directly in the merging of the classical and contemporary stories.
2. This change in the relationship between audience and stage is accompanied by a marked change in the play's language, nothing less than a complete shift in **register**. The dialogue so far has been naturalistic, with short, sometimes disjointed, utterances peppered

with slang and the odd Afrikaans phrase. However, you may have noted that in this scene the characters still speak forcefully, but much more formally, using words like 'defiance', 'transgression', 'impunity'. The length of John's opening speeches – the first a kind of Prologue, and the second spoken in the role of Creon – also impose an entirely different pace on the scene. However, the opening phrase of Winston's final speech as Antigone, before he tears off his wig (p. 205), may have reminded you of Winston's own 'voice'. At this point, his words 'Brothers and Sisters of the Land!' (the inclusive 'sisters' here makes it clear that he is addressing not just the all-male prison audience) re-echoes the Xhosa rallying-cry 'Nyana we Sizwe!' we heard first at the start of the play (p. 175) and then twice, emphatically, at the end of Scene 3 (p. 200).

The whole of Winston-as-Antigone's farewell speech is poetic in its simplicity, and although he refers to 'the Island' as the place of incarceration, rather than the tomb to which Sophocles' Antigone is consigned, his words stay close to those of the character in Sophocles' play (in a modern English translation, of course). However, it is when he speaks to the audience in his own character that the most profound effects are achieved, for here Sophocles' words pierce through the play text directly, unchanged. At the climax of the play, then, Antigone's words, with all the weight and authority of classical tradition behind them, are bestowed on Winston in his own person, rather than as an actor playing Antigone, in a vivid and moving demonstration of their common fate and common humanity.

The play ends, as it began, with an extended mime. We gradually move from the world of theatre, as John and Winston come out of their roles and take down their makeshift 'set', to the world of the prison. Their shackled three-legged run recapitulates the second phase of the long mime in Scene 1, and the wail of the siren takes the audience back to the moment before the stage lights first came up at the very beginning of the play. You might want to pause here and consider briefly the effects of the play's circular structure, and the possible meanings implied. But any extended discussion about *The Island*'s meaning must also take into account the context within which it is performed, and this is why I would like us to now turn to the play's performance history.

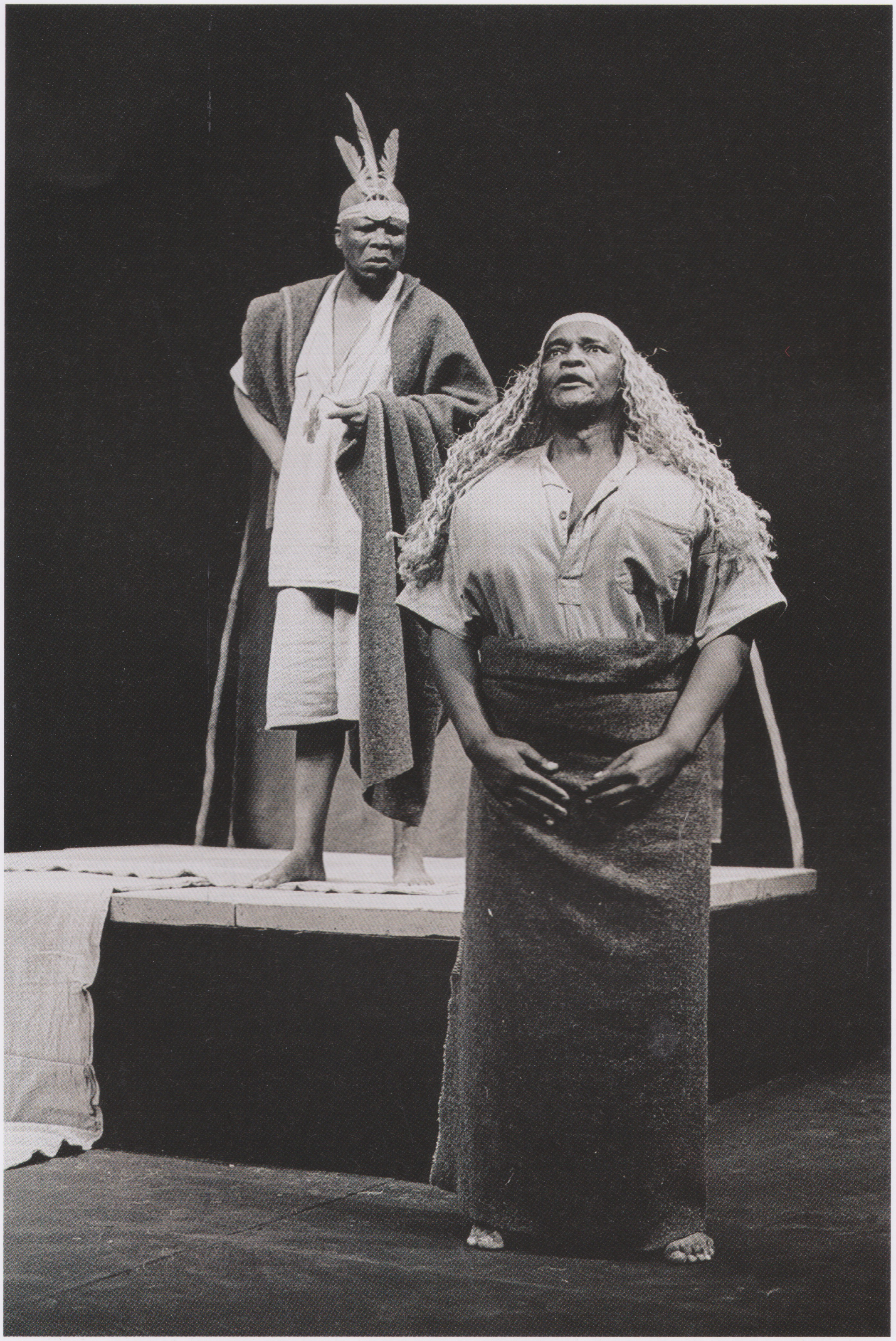

Figure 4.4 John and Winston playing Antigone and Creon in a 1995 revival of *The Island* at the Market Theatre, Johannesburg, South Africa. Photographed by Ruphin Coudyzer. Photo: © Ruphin Coudyzer FPPSA – www.ruphin.com.

4.3 *The Island*'s performance history

After its obscure and precarious premiere in Cape Town under the title *Die Hodoshe Span*, the play quickly acquired an international reputation, appearing in London, newly titled, just a few months later. This was partly because of lucky timing: in 1971, Athol Fugard had travelled to Britain to direct one of his plays, *Boesman and Lena*, at London's Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, and when plans were made for a season of South African drama at the Royal Court in the winter of 1973, he was invited back. So after an anxious wait for passports, Kani, Ntshona and Fugard brought their production of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* to London, and, alongside it, their new play *The Island*, for the opening of the Royal Court's 'South African season' in December 1973.

There was much acclaim for the plays, and particularly for the inspired performances by Kani and Ntshona. But there were also objections: one South African newspaper, for example, reported that the South African Embassy in London had received complaints about the play's 'propaganda' element (*Eastern Province Herald*, quoted in The Open University, 1991, p. 92).

The following year both plays transferred to the Edison Theatre, New York, and the texts, along with that of Fugard's single-authored play, *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act*, were published by Oxford University Press. *The Island* was thus well on the way to international recognition, and it was this that secured the play protection from censorship in South Africa, where the first 'open' production took place at a new arts centre in Johannesburg in 1977.

The play was also performed elsewhere, especially in Africa (there were notable productions in Zimbabwe in 1985 and 1999, for example), and by other actors, but Kani and Ntshona continued to be involved with *The Island* for three decades. In one of their revivals, in Cape Town in 1985, the following statement was made in the programme and subsequently quoted in a Cape Town newspaper:

> We, John Kani and Winston Ntshona, declare every single performance of this play, *The Island*, as an endorsement of the local and international call for the immediate release of Mr Nelson Mandela and all political prisoners and detainees. We earnestly

> hope that this call will receive the support of all well-meaning South Africans.
>
> (*Weekend Argus*, quoted in The Open University, 1991, p. 92)

Ten years later Kani and Ntshona were actually able to perform the play in Johannesburg again, to an audience that included Nelson Mandela, by then President of South Africa, and 300 former political prisoners. At the end of the performance the audience and cast joined in singing the national (ANC) anthem: *The Island* had become an act of celebration.

You may recall that you listened to this anthem as part of your work on musical canons in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.

Activity

Spend a moment thinking about your own response to the play: how useful would the terms 'propaganda' or 'protest' be in articulating this response?

Discussion

This is another of those questions for which there will be as many different answers as there are people answering it. You might have reflected that *The Island* makes no direct reference to the South African government, or to Nelson Mandela. It would be difficult, then, to argue that the play is simply propaganda or 'protest theatre', although it may include some of those elements. For some of us, studying the play in the twenty-first century long after the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa, the political dimension might appear to be mainly a matter of historical interest. But the play continues to be performed in new contexts. For example, when Kani and Ntshona performed the play during their 2002 tour of the United Kingdom, the programme notes (along with large theatre posters) drew attention to the work of the human rights organisation Amnesty International. Audiences were thus prompted to think about the current plight of political prisoners around the world rather than back to the specifics of South Africa under apartheid.

One of the ideas we keep returning to in *Voices and texts* is that context always affects meaning. This is particularly important in the case of drama, since performance, by definition, is linked to a particular place at a particular time and happens in the presence of particular people. So performances of *The Island* in South Africa, both during and after apartheid, inevitably sound a different note from performances in the west. In his book on Athol Fugard's work, Dennis Walder draws on the idea of theatre as a form of 'bearing witness' – a function associated strongly with twentieth-century European drama – to account for *The Island*'s continuing relevance:

> [I]f, as I would argue, *The Island* did bear witness, rather than articulate a call to arms, then I would also argue that it continues to do so – not because things have stayed the same, but because they have changed. Nobody gets detained on Robben Island any more; and the draconian laws that led to imprisonment for dissent have been repealed. But the extreme experience to which the play testifies, and the way in which the prisoners resist and survive if only temporarily by play acting, has not dated, in a world in which the experience of being detained and tortured for one's racial identity remains depressingly familiar.
>
> (Walder, 2003, pp. 58–9)

4.4 Authority and identity

The Island has been seen by audiences throughout the world, and has accumulated prestige – and consequent authority – by association with influential figures such as the director Peter Brook, who arranged a restaging of the play with Kani and Ntshona at the Bouffes du Nord, Paris, in 1999. Kani and Ntshona's long involvement with the play has also lent considerable authority to their performances; it must be impossible for other actors to take on the roles of John and Winston without a keen awareness of their originators. But the play's emphasis on the theme of identity goes beyond association with these actors: as Walder notes, '"John" and "Winston" … perform their resistance to imprisonment by taking on apparently innocuous, "classical" identities' (2003, p. 59). The play not only appropriates the cultural authority of Sophocles' tragedy by reworking the conflict between Antigone and Creon, but also uses this vehicle to assert the importance of identity on behalf of those who are oppressed or marginalised. As in Michael Longley's reworking of a part of the *Iliad* in his poem 'Ceasefire', a political point is being made. If *The Island* has become a canonical modern play – as arguably it has – it is because it fuses its basis in Greek tragedy with a wider concern for individual identity in the conflict between private and public morality.

Conclusion

This chapter and the previous one have both shown how texts from ancient Greece have provided a foundation for quite different works produced many centuries later. This suggests that artistic canons are dynamic not simply because they change over time, as you saw in Chapter 2, but because canonical works may embody the potential to generate new texts that draw on some of the authority of the originals.

Your reading of *The Island* has also broadened your approach to the academic subject Literature, introduced in Chapter 2, through the study of a different genre, drama. You will encounter further examples of dramatic writing in Book 2, but there the perspective will be different, as you will be approaching this material from the angle of Creative Writing, another branch of the larger subject we generally call 'English'. However, your study of *The Island*, a play that grew out of improvisation and collaboration, serves as a reminder that creativity is a quality that pervades the arts, and manifests itself not just in the written productions of individual authors but across a very wide spectrum of activities that incorporate making and performing.

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Reading

Reading 4.1: *The Island*

The Island was devised by Athol Fugard, John Kani and Winston Ntshona. It was first performed on 2 July 1973, and was directed by Athol Fugard, with John Kani as John and Winston Ntshona as Winston. The version of the text included in this reading was edited with notes by Dennis Walder.

Characters:

JOHN

WINSTON

Scene 1

Centre stage: a raised area representing a cell on Robben Island[1]*. Blankets and sleeping-mats – the prisoners sleep on the floor – are neatly folded. In one corner are a bucket of water and two tin mugs.*

The long drawn-out wail of a siren. Stage-lights come up to reveal a moat of harsh, white light around the cell. In it the two prisoners – John stage-right and Winston stage-left – mime the digging of sand. They wear the prison uniform of khaki shirt and short trousers. Their heads are shaven. It is an image of back-breaking and grotesquely futile labour. Each in turn fills a wheelbarrow and then with great effort pushes it to where the other man is digging, and empties it. As a result, the piles of sand never diminish. Their labour is interminable. The only sounds are their grunts as they dig, the squeal of the wheelbarrows as they circle the cell, and the hum of Hodoshe[2]*, the green carrion fly.*

A whistle is blown. They stop digging and come together, standing side by side as they are handcuffed together and shackled at the ankles. Another whistle. They start to run … John mumbling a prayer, Winston muttering a rhythm for their three-legged run.

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[1] **a cell on Robben Island***:* small island about seven miles off the Atlantic coast at Cape Town, a place of banishment or imprisonment since the beginning of white settlement. A leper colony for much of the nineteenth century, it was also used to imprison African chiefs who resisted the whites, and as a mental asylum. In 1959 a maximum security prison was built, at first housing convicted criminal offenders as well as 'politicals'. The prisoners were black, the warders white. The prison had a capacity of 650 prisoners.

[2] ***Hodoshe:*** the Afrikaans word for a carrion fly, but also the name of the chief warder.

They do not run fast enough. They get beaten … Winston receiving a bad blow to the eye and John spraining an ankle. In this condition they arrive finally at the cell door. Handcuffs and shackles are taken off. After being searched, they lurch into their cell. The door closes behind them. Both men sink to the floor.

A moment of total exhaustion until slowly, painfully, they start to explore their respective injuries … Winston his eye, and John his ankle. Winston is moaning softly and this eventually draws John's attention away from his ankle. He crawls to Winston and examines the injured eye. It needs attention. Winston's moaning is slowly turning into a sound of inarticulate outrage, growing in volume and violence. John urinates into one hand and tries to clean the other man's eye with it, but Winston's anger and outrage are now uncontrollable. He breaks away from John and crawls around the cell, blind with rage and pain. John tries to placate him … the noise could bring back the warders and still more trouble. Winston eventually finds the cell door but before he can start banging on it John pulls him away.

WINSTON [*calling*]. Hodoshe!

JOHN Leave him, Winston. Listen to me, man! If he comes now we'll be in bigger shit.

WINSTON I want Hodoshe. I want him now! I want to take him to the office. He must read my warrant. I was sentenced to Life, brother, not bloody Death!

JOHN Please, Winston! He made us run. …

WINSTON I want Hodoshe!

JOHN He made us run. He's happy now. Leave him. Maybe he'll let us go back to the quarry tomorrow. …

[*Winston is suddenly silent. For a moment John thinks his words are having an effect, but then he realizes that the other man is looking at his ear. Winston touches it. It is bleeding. A sudden spasm of fear from John, who puts a hand to his ear. His fingers come away with blood on them. The two men look at each other.*]

WINSTON *Nyana we Sizwe!*[3]

[*In a reversal of earlier roles Winston now gets John down on the floor of the cell so as to examine the injured ear. He has to wipe blood and sweat out of his eyes in order to see clearly. John winces with pain. Winston keeps restraining him.*]

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[3] ***Nyana we Sizwe***: an ancient Xhosa rallying cry, used again at the end of Scene 3, meaning 'Son of the Land!' or 'Brother!'.

WINSTON [*eventually*]. It's not too bad. [*Using his shirt-tail he cleans the injured ear.*]

JOHN [*through clenched teeth as Winston tends his ear*]. Hell, *ons was gemoer vandag!*[4] [*A weak smile.*] News bulletin and weather forecast! Black Domination was chased by White Domination. Black Domination lost its shoes and collected a few bruises. Black Domination will run barefoot to the quarry tomorrow. Conditions locally remain unchanged – thunderstorms with the possibility of cold showers and rain. Elsewhere, fine and warm!

[*Winston has now finished tending John's ear and settles down on the floor beside him. He clears his nose, ears, and eyes of sand.*]

WINSTON Sand! Same old sea and sand I used to play with when I was young. St George's Strand[5]. New Year's Day. Sand dunes. Sand castles ….

JOHN *Ja,*[6] we used to go there too. Last …. [*Pause and then a small laugh. He shakes his head.*] The Christmas before they arrested me, we were down there. All of us. Honeybush. My little Monde played in the sand. We'd given her one of those little buckets and spades for Christmas.

WINSTON *Ja.*

JOHN Anyway, it was Daddy's turn today. [*Shaking his head ruefully.*] *Haai,*[7] Winston, this one goes on the record. 'Struesgod! I'm a man, brother. A man! But if Hodoshe had kept us at those wheelbarrows five minutes longer …! There would have been a baby on the Island tonight. I nearly cried.

WINSTON *Ja.*

JOHN There was no end to it, except one of us!

WINSTON That's right.

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[4] ***Hell, ons was gemoer vandag!***: (Afrikaans) Hell, we were really beaten up today!

[5] **St George's Strand**: a beach near Port Elizabeth.

[6] ***Ja:*** (Afrikaans) Yes

[7] ***Haai***: exclamation of surprise or alarm (from Xhosa 'hayi' = no).

JOHN This morning, when he said: 'You two! The beach!' … I thought, Okay, so it's my turn to empty the sea into a hole. He likes that one. But when he pointed to the wheelbarrows, and I saw his idea …! [*Shaking his head.*] I laughed at first. Then I wasn't laughing. Then I hated you. You looked so stupid, *broer*![8]

WINSTON That's what he wanted.

JOHN It was going to last forever, man! Because of *you*. And for *you*, because of *me*. *Moer!*[9] He's cleverer than I thought.

WINSTON If he was God, he would have done it.

JOHN What?

WINSTON Broken us. Men get tired. Hey! There's a thought. We're still alive because Hodoshe got tired.

JOHN Tomorrow?

WINSTON We'll see.

JOHN If he takes us back there … If I hear that wheelbarrow … of yours again, coming with another bloody load of … eternity!

WINSTON [*with calm resignation*]. We'll see.

[*Pause. John looks at Winston.*]

JOHN [*with quiet emphasis, as if the other man did not fully understand the significance of what he had said*]. I *hated* you, Winston.

WINSTON [*meeting John's eyes*]. *I* hated *you*.

[*John puts a hand on Winston's shoulder. Their brotherhood is intact. He gets slowly to his feet.*]

JOHN Where's the *lap*?

WINSTON Somewhere. Look for it.

JOHN Hey! You had it last.

[*Limping around the cell looking for their wash-rag.*]

WINSTON *Haai*, man! You got no wife here. Look for the rag yourself.

JOHN [*finding the rag beside the water bucket*]. Look where it is. Look! Hodoshe comes in here and sees it. 'Whose *lappie* is that?' Then what do you say?

WINSTON 'It's his rag, sir.'

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[8] ***broer***: brother.
[9] ***Moer!***: (Afrikaans) a term of abuse, equivalent to 'Fuck!'.

JOHN Yes? Okay. 'It's my rag, sir.' When you wash, use your shirt.

WINSTON Okay, okay! 'It's our rag, sir!'

JOHN That'll be the bloody day!

[*John, getting ready to wash, starts to take off his shirt. Winston produces a cigarette butt, matches, and flint from their hiding-place under the water bucket. He settles down for a smoke.*]

Shit, today was long. Hey, Winston, suppose the watch of the chap behind the siren is slow! We could still be there, man! [*He pulls out three or four rusty nails from a secret pocket in his trousers. He holds them out to Winston.*] Hey, there.

WINSTON What?

JOHN With the others.

WINSTON [*taking the nails*]. What's this?

JOHN Necklace, man. With the others.

WINSTON Necklace?

JOHN Antigone's necklace.

WINSTON *Ag*,[10] shit, man!

[*Slams the nails down on the cell floor and goes on smoking.*]

Antigone! Go to hell, man, John.

JOHN Hey, don't start any nonsense now. You promised. [*Limps over to Winston's bed-roll and produces a half-completed necklace made of nails and string.*] It's nearly finished. Look. Three fingers, one nail. … three fingers, one nail … [*Places the necklace beside Winston who is shaking his head, smoking aggressively, and muttering away.*] Don't start any nonsense now, Winston. There's six days to go to the concert. We're committed. We promised the chaps we'd do something. This *Antigone* is just right for us. Six more days and we'll make it.

[*He continues washing.*]

WINSTON Jesus, John! We were down on the beach today. Hodoshe made us run. Can't you just leave a man …?

JOHN To hell with you! Who do you think ran with you? I'm also tired, but we can't back out now. Come on! Three fingers ….

WINSTON … one nail! [*Shaking his head.*] *Haai … haai … haai!*

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[10] ***Ag***: (Afrikaans exclamation) Oh (pronounced like German 'ach').

JOHN Stop moaning and get on with it. Shit, Winston! What sort of progress is this? [*Abandoning his wash.*] Listen. Listen! Number 42 is practising the Zulu War Dance. Down there they're rehearsing their songs. It's just in this *moer* cell that there's always an argument. Today you want to do it, tomorrow you don't want to do it. How the hell must I know what to report to the chaps tomorrow if we go back to the quarry?

[*Winston is unyielding. His obstinacy gets the better of John, who eventually throws the wash-rag at him.*]

There! Wash!

[*John applies himself to the necklace while Winston still muttering away in an undertone, starts to clean himself.*]

How can I be sure of anything when you carry on like this? We've still got to learn the words, the moves. Shit! It could be so bloody good, man.

[*Winston mutters protests all the way through this speech of John's. The latter holds up the necklace.*]

Nearly finished! Look at it! Three fingers ….

WINSTON … one nail.

JOHN *Ja!* Simple. Do you still remember all I told you yesterday? Bet you've bloody forgotten. How can I carry on like this? I can't move on, man. Over the whole bloody lot again! Who Antigone is … who Creon is ….

WINSTON Antigone is mother to Polynices ….

JOHN *Haai, haai, haai* … shit, Winston! [*Now really exasperated.*] How many times must I tell you that Antigone is the sister to the two brothers? Not the mother. That's another play.[11]

WINSTON Oh.

JOHN That's all you know! 'Oh.' [*He abandons the necklace and fishes out a piece of chalk from a crack in the floor.*] Come here. This is the last time. 'Struesgod. The last time.

WINSTON *Ag*, no, John.

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[11] **That's another play**: Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, in which the mother of Polynices (Jocasta, not Antigone) has a major role.

JOHN Come! I'm putting this plot down for the last time! If you don't learn it tonight I'm going to report you to the old men tomorrow. And remember, *broer*, those old men will make Hodoshe and his tricks look like a little boy.

WINSTON Jesus Christ! Learn to dig for Hodoshe, learn to run for Hodoshe, and what happens when I get back to the cell? Learn to read *Antigone*!

JOHN Come! And shut up! [*He pulls the reluctant Winston down beside him on the floor. Winston continues to clean himself with the rag while John lays out the 'plot' of* Antigone.] If you would just stop moaning, you would learn faster. Now listen!

WINSTON Okay, do it.

JOHN Listen! It is the Trial of Antigone. Right?

WINSTON So you say.

JOHN First, the accused. Who is the accused?

WINSTON Antigone.

JOHN Coming from you that's bloody progress. [*Writing away on the cell floor with his chalk*.] Next the State. Who is the State?

WINSTON Creon.

JOHN King Creon. Creon is the State. Now … what did Antigone do?

WINSTON Antigone buried her brother Eteocles.

JOHN No, no, no! Shit, Winston, when are you going to remember this thing? I told you, man, Antigone buried Polynices. The traitor! The one who I said was on *our* side. Right?

WINSTON Right.

JOHN Stage one of the Trial. [*Writing on the floor*.] The State lays its charges against the Accused … and lists counts … you know the way they do it. Stage two is Pleading. What does Antigone plead? Guilty or Not Guilty?

WINSTON Not Guilty.

JOHN [*trying to be tactful*]. Now look, Winston, we're not going to argue. Between me and you, in this cell, we know that she's Not Guilty. But in the play she pleads Guilty.

WINSTON No, man, John! Antigone is Not Guilty. …

JOHN In the play ….

WINSTON [*losing his temper*]. To hell with the play! Antigone had every right to bury her brother.

JOHN Don't say 'To hell with the play'. We've got to do the bloody thing. And in the play she pleads Guilty. Get that straight. Antigone pleads ….

WINSTON [*giving up in disgust*]. Okay, do it your way.

JOHN It's not my way! In the play ….

WINSTON Guilty!

JOHN Yes, Guilty! [*Writes furiously on the floor.*]

WINSTON Guilty.

JOHN Stage three, Pleading in Mitigation of Sentence. Stage four, Sentence, State Summary, and something from you … Farewell Words. Now learn that.

WINSTON Hey?

JOHN [*getting up*]. Learn that!

WINSTON But we've just done it!

JOHN I've just done it. Now you learn it.

WINSTON [*throwing aside the wash-rag with disgust before applying himself to learning the 'plot'*]. Learn to run, learn to read. …

JOHN And don't throw the rag there! [*Retrieving the rag and placing it in its correct place.*] Don't be so bloody difficult, man. We're nearly there. You'll be proud of this thing when we've done it.

[*Limps to his bed-roll and produces a pendant made from a jam-tin lid and twine.*]

Look. Winston, look! Creon's medallion. Good, hey! [*Hangs it around his neck.*] I'll finish the necklace while you learn that. [*He strings on the remaining nails.*] Jesus, Winston! June 1965.[12]

WINSTON What?

JOHN This, man. *Antigone.* In New Brighton. St Stephen's Hall. The place was packed, man! All the big people. Front row … dignitaries. Shit, those were the days. Georgie was Creon. You know Georgie?

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[12] **June 1965**: recalling the Serpent Players' production of *Antigone*, with Nomhle Nkonyeni and George Mnci, which took place in St Stephen's Hall, New Brighton, as a police round-up in the area was in full force. 'Mulligan' Mbikwane was another Player in the production, as were 'Sipho' and 'Simon'.

WINSTON The teacher?

JOHN That's him. He played Creon. Should have seen him, Winston. Short and fat, with big eyes, but by the time the play was finished he was as tall as the roof.

[*Onto his legs in an imitation of Georgie's Creon.*]

'My Councillors, now that the Gods have brought our City safe through a storm of troubles to tranquillity. …' And old Mulligan! Another short-arsed teacher. With a beard! He used to go up to the Queen. … [*Another imitation.*] 'Your Majesty, prepare for grief, but do not weep.'

[*The necklace in his hands.*]

Nearly finished!

Nomhle played Antigone. A bastard of a lady that one, but a beautiful bitch. Can't get her out of my mind tonight.

WINSTON [*indicating the 'plot'*]. I know this.

JOHN You sure?

WINSTON This? … it's here. [*Tapping his head.*]

JOHN You're not bullshitting, hey? [*He rubs out the 'plot' and then paces the cell.*] Right. The Trial of Antigone. Who is the Accused?

WINSTON Antigone.

JOHN Who is the State?

WINSTON King Creon.

JOHN Stage one.

WINSTON [*supremely self-confident*]. Antigone lays charges ….

JOHN NO, SHIT, MAN, WINSTON!!!

[*Winston pulls John down and stifles his protests with a hand over his mouth.*]

WINSTON Okay … okay … listen, John … listen. … The State lays charges against Antigone.

[*Pause.*]

JOHN Be careful!

WINSTON The State lays charges against Antigone.

JOHN Stage two.

WINSTON Pleading.

JOHN What does she plead? Guilty or Not Guilty?

WINSTON Guilty.

JOHN Stage three.

WINSTON Pleading in Mitigation of Sentence.

JOHN Stage four.

WINSTON State Summary, Sentence, and Farewell Words.

JOHN [*very excited*]. He's got it! That's my man. See how easy it is, Winston? Tomorrow, just the words.

[*Winston gets onto his legs, John puts away the props. Mats and blankets are unrolled. The two men prepare for sleep.*]

JOHN Hell, I hope we go back to the quarry tomorrow. There's still a lot of things we need for props and costumes. Your wig! The boys in Number Fourteen said they'd try and smuggle me a piece of rope from the jetty.

WINSTON *Ja*, I hope we're back there. I want to try and get some tobacco through to Sipho.

JOHN Sipho?

WINSTON Back in solitary.

JOHN Again!

WINSTON *Ja*.

JOHN Oh hell!

WINSTON Simon passed the word.

JOHN What was it this time?

WINSTON Complained about the food I think. Demanded to see the book of Prison Regulations.

JOHN Why don't they leave him alone for a bit?

WINSTON Because he doesn't leave them alone.

JOHN You're right. I'm glad I'm not in Number Twenty-two with him. One man starts getting hard-arsed like that and the whole lot of you end up in the shit.

[*Winston's bed is ready. He lies down.*]

You know what I'm saying?

WINSTON *Ja*.

JOHN What?

WINSTON What 'What'?

JOHN What am I saying?

WINSTON *Haai,* Johnny, man! I'm tired now! Let a man ….

JOHN I'm saying Don't Be hard-Arsed! You! When Hodoshe opens that door tomorrow say '*Ja, Baas*' the right way. I don't want to be back on that bloody beach tomorrow just because you feel like being difficult.

WINSTON [*wearily*]. Okay, man, Johnny.

JOHN You're not alone in this cell. I'm here too.

WINSTON Jesus, you think I don't know that!

JOHN People must remember their responsibilities to others.

WINSTON I'm glad to hear you say that, because I was just going to remind you that it is your turn tonight.

JOHN What do you mean? Wasn't it my turn last night?

WINSTON [*shaking his head emphatically*]. *Haai, haai.* Don't you remember? Last night I took you to bioscope.

JOHN Hey, by the way! So you did. Bloody good film too. 'Fastest Gun in the West'. Glenn Ford.

[*Whips out a six-shooter and guns down a few bad men.*]

You were bullshitting me a bit, though. How the hell can Glenn Ford shoot backwards through his legs? I tried to work that one out on the beach. [*He is now seated on his bed-roll. After a moment's thought he holds up an empty mug as a telephone-receiver and starts to dial. Winston watches him with puzzlement.*]

Operator, put me through to New Brighton, please … yes, New Brighton, Port Elizabeth. The number is 414624. … Yes, mine is local … local. …

WINSTON [*recognizing the telephone number*]. The Shop!

[*He sits upright with excitement as John launches into the telephone conversation.*]

JOHN That you, Scott? Hello, man! Guess who! … You got it! You bastard! Hell, shit, Scott, man … how things with you? No, still inside. Give the news, man … you don't say! No, we don't hear anything here … not a word. … What's that? Business is bad? … You bloody undertaker! People aren't dying fast enough! No, things are fine here. …

[*Winston, squirming with excitement, has been trying unsuccessfully to interrupt John's torrent of words and laughter. He finally succeeds in drawing John's attention.*]

WINSTON Who else is there? Who's with Scott?

JOHN Hey, Scott, who's there with you? … Oh no! … call him to the phone, man. …

WINSTON Who's it?

JOHN [*ignoring Winston*]. Just for a minute, man, please, Scott. … [*Ecstatic response from John as another voice comes over the phone.*] Hello there, you beautiful bastard … how's it, man? …

WINSTON Who the hell is it, man?

JOHN [*hand over the receiver*]. Sky!

[*Winston can no longer contain his excitement. He scrambles out of his bed to join John, and joins in the fun with questions and remarks whispered into John's ear. Both men enjoy it enormously.*]

How's it with Mangi? Where's Vusi? How are the chaps keeping, Sky? Winston? … All right, man. He's here next to me. No, fine, man, fine, man … small accident today when he collided with Hodoshe, but nothing to moan about. His right eye bruised, that's all. Hey, Winston's asking how are the punkies[13] doing? [*Big laugh.*] You bloody lover boy! Leave something for us, man!

[*John becomes aware of Winston trying to interrupt again: to Winston.*] Okay … okay….

[*Back to the telephone.*] Listen, Sky, Winston says if you get a chance go down to Dora Street, to his wife. Tell V., Winston says he's okay, things are fine. Winston says she must carry on … nothing has happened … tell her to take care of everything and everybody. … *Ja.* … .

[*The mention of his wife guillotines Winston's excitement and fun. After a few seconds of silence, he crawls back heavily to his bed and lies down. A similar shift in mood takes place in John.*]

[13] **punkies***:* 'good-time' girls at the shebeen.

And look, Sky, you're not far from Gratten Street. Cross over to it, man, drop in on number thirty-eight, talk to Princess, my wife. How is she keeping? Ask her for me. I haven't received a letter for three months now. Why aren't they writing? Tell her to write, man. I want to know how the children are keeping. Is Monde still at school? How's my twin baby, my Father and Mother? Is the old girl sick? They mustn't be afraid to tell me. I want to know. I know it's an effort to write, but it means a lot to us here. Tell her … this was another day. They're not very different here. We were down on the beach. The wind was blowing. The sand got in our eyes. The sea was rough. I couldn't see the mainland properly. Tell them that maybe tomorrow we'll go to the quarry. It's not so bad there. We'll be with the others. Tell her also … it's starting to get cold now, but the worst is still coming.

[*Slow fade to blackout.*]

Scene 2

The cell, a few days later.

John is hidden under a blanket. Winston is in the process of putting on Antigone's wig and false breasts.

JOHN Okay?

WINSTON [*still busy*]. No.

JOHN Okay?

WINSTON No.

JOHN Okay?

WINSTON No.

[*Pause*]

JOHN Okay?

[*Winston is ready. He stands waiting. John slowly lifts the blanket and looks. He can't believe his eyes. Winston is a very funny sight. John's amazement turns into laughter, which builds steadily. He bangs on the cell wall.*]

Hey, Norman. Norman! Come this side, man. I got it here. *Poes!*[14]

[*John launches into an extravagant send-up of Winston's Antigone. He circles 'her' admiringly, he fondles her breasts, he walks arm in arm with her down Main Street, collapsing with laughter between each 'turn'. He climaxes everything by dropping his trousers.*]

Speedy Gonzales! Here I come!

[*This last joke is too much for Winston who has endured the whole performance with mounting but suppressed anger. He tears off the wig and breasts, throws them down on the cell floor, and storms over to the water bucket where he starts to clean himself.*]

WINSTON It's finished! I'm not doing it. Take your Antigone and shove it up your arse!

JOHN [*trying to control himself*]. Wait, man. Wait ….

[*He starts laughing again.*]

WINSTON There is nothing to wait for, my friend, I'm not doing it.

JOHN Please, Winston!

WINSTON You can laugh as much as you like, my friend, but just let's get one thing straight, I'm *not* doing Antigone. And in case you want to know why … I'm a man, not a bloody woman.

JOHN When did I say otherwise?

WINSTON What were you laughing at?

JOHN I'm not laughing now.

WINSTON What are you doing, crying?

[*Another burst of laughter from John.*]

There you go again, more laughing! Shit, man, you want me to go out there tomorrow night and make a bloody fool of myself? You think I don't know what will happen after that? Every time I run to the quarry … 'Nyah … nyah. … Here comes Antigone! … Help the poor lady! …' Well, you can go to hell with your Antigone.

JOHN I wasn't laughing at you.

WINSTON Then who were you laughing at? Who else was here that dressed himself as a lady and made a bloody fool of himself?

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[14] ***Poes!***: (Afrikaans) obscene slang: 'Cunt!'

JOHN [*now trying very hard to placate the other man*]. Okay Winston, Okay! I'm not laughing any more.

WINSTON You can go to hell with what you're saying.

JOHN Look, Winston, try to understand, man, … this is Theatre.

WINSTON You call laughing at me, Theatre? Then go to hell with your Theatre!

JOHN Please, Winston, just stop talking and listen to me.

WINSTON No! You get this brother, … I am not doing your Antigone! I would rather run the whole day for Hodoshe. At least I know where I stand with him. All *he* wants is to make me a 'boy' … not a bloody woman.

JOHN Okay, okay ….

WINSTON Nothing you can say …

JOHN [*shouting the other man down*]. Will you bloody listen!

WINSTON [*throwing the wash-rag down violently*]. Okay. I'm listening.

JOHN Sure I laughed. *Ja … I laughed.* But can I tell you why I laughed? I was preparing you for … stage fright! You think I don't know what I'm doing in this cell? This is preparation for stage fright! I know those bastards out there. When you get in front of them, sure they'll laugh … 'Nyah, nyah!' … they'll laugh. But just remember this, brother, nobody laughs forever! There'll come a time when they'll stop laughing, and that will be the time when our Antigone hits them with her words.

WINSTON You're day-dreaming, John. Just get it into your head that I'm not doing Antigone. It's as simple as that.

JOHN [*realizing for the first time that Winston needs to be handled very carefully*]. Hey, Winston! Hold on there, man. We've only got one more day to go! They've given us the best spot in the programme. We end the show! You can't back out now.

WINSTON You think I can't? Just wait and see.

JOHN Winston! You want to get me into trouble? Is that what you want?

WINSTON Okay, I won't back out.

JOHN [*delighted with his easy victory*]. That's my man!

WINSTON [*retrieving the wig and false breasts off the floor and slamming them into John's hands*]. Here's Antigone … take these titties and hair and play Antigone. I'm going to play Creon. Do you understand what I'm saying? Take your two titties …. I'll have my balls and play Creon. [*Turns his back on a flabbergasted John, fishes out a cigarette-butt and matches from under the water bucket, and settles down for a smoke.*]

JOHN [*after a stunned silence*]. You won't make it! I thought about that one, days ago. It's too late now to learn Creon's words.

WINSTON [*smoking*]. I hate to say it, but that is just too bad. I am not doing Antigone.

[*John is now furious. After a moment's hesitation he stuffs on the wig and false breasts and confronts Winston.*]

JOHN Look at me. Now laugh.

[*Winston tries, but the laugh is forced and soon dies away.*]

Go on.

[*Pause.*]

Go on laughing! Why did you stop? Must I tell you why? Because behind all this rubbish is me, and you know it's me. You think those bastards out there won't know it's you? Yes, they'll laugh. But who cares about that as long as they laugh in the beginning and listen at the end. That's all we want them to do … listen at the end!

WINSTON I don't care what you say, John. I'm not doing Antigone.

JOHN Winston … you're being difficult. You promised ….

WINSTON Go to hell, man. Only last night you tell me that this Antigone is a bloody … what you call it … legend! A Greek one at that. Bloody thing never even happened. Not even history! Look, brother, I got no time for bullshit. Fuck legends. Me? … I live my life here! I know why I'm here, and it's history, not legends. I had my chat with a magistrate in Cradock[15] and now I'm here. Your Antigone is a child's play, man.

JOHN Winston! That's Hodoshe's talk.

WINSTON You can go to hell with that one too.

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[15] **Cradock**: Eastern Cape Town, to which those rounded up in the Port Elizabeth area were taken.

JOHN Hodoshe's talk, Winston! That's what he says all the time. What he wants us to say all our lives. Our convictions, our ideals … that's what he calls them … child's play. Everything we fucking do is 'child's play' … when we ran that whole day in the sun and pushed those wheelbarrows, when we cry, when we shit … child's play! Look, brother, … I've had enough! No one is going to stop me doing Antigone ….

[*The two men break apart suddenly, drop their trousers, and stand facing the wall with arms outstretched. Hodoshe calls John.*]

Yes, sir!

[*He then pulls up his trousers and leaves the cell. When he has left, Winston pulls up his trousers and starts muttering with savage satisfaction at the thought of John in Hodoshe's hands.*]

WINSTON There he goes. Serves him right. I just hope Hodoshe teaches him a lesson. Antigone is important! Antigone this! Antigone that! Shit, man. Nobody can sleep in this bloody cell because of all that bullshit. Polynices! Eteocles! The other prisoners too. Nobody gets any peace and quiet because of that bloody Antigone! I hope Hodoshe gives it to him.

[*He is now at the cell door. He listens, then moves over to the wig on the floor and circles it. He finally picks it up. Moves back to the cell door to make sure no one is coming. The water bucket gives him an idea. He puts on the wig and, after some difficulty, manages to see his reflection in the water. A good laugh, which he cuts off abruptly. He moves around the cell trying out a few of Antigone's poses. None of them work. He feels a fool. He finally tears off the wig and throws it down on the floor with disgust.*]

Ag, voetsek![16]

[*Hands in pockets, he paces the cell with grim determination.*]

I'm not going to do it. And I'm going to tell him. When he comes back. For once he must just shut that big bloody mouth of his and listen. To me! I'm not going to argue, but 'struesgod that …!

[*The wig on the floor. He stamps on it.*]

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[16] ***Ag voetsek!:*** (Afrikaans) offensive command, originally to a dog, as in 'Oh, fuck off!'.

Shit, man! If he wants a woman in the cell he must send for his wife, and I don't give a damn how he does it. I didn't walk with those men and burn my bloody passbook in front of that police station, and have a magistrate send me here for life so that he can dress me up like a woman and make a bloody fool of me. I'm going to tell him. When he walks through that door.

[*John returns. Winston is so involved in the problem of Antigone that at first he does not register John's strangely vacant manner.*]

Listen, *broer*, I'm not trying to be difficult, but this Antigone! No! Please listen to me, John. 'Struesgod I can't do it. I mean, let's try something else, like singing or something. You always got ideas. You know I can sing or dance. But not Antigone. Please, John.

JOHN [*quietly*]. Winston ….

WINSTON [*still blind to the other man's manner*]. Don't let's argue, man. We're been together in this cell too long now to quarrel about rubbish. But you know me. If there's one thing I can't stand it's people laughing at me. If I go out there tomorrow night and those bastards start laughing I'll fuck up the first one I lay my hands on. You saw yourself what happened in here when you started laughing. I wanted to *moer* you,[17] John. I'm not joking. I really wanted to …. Hey, are you listening to me? [*Looking squarely at John.*]

JOHN Winston … I've got something to tell you.

WINSTON [*registering John's manner for the first time*]. What's the matter? Hodoshe? What happened? Are we in shit? Solitary?

JOHN My appeal was heard last Wednesday. Sentence reduced. I've got three months to go.

[*Long silence. Winston in stunned. Eventually* ….]

WINSTON Three ….

JOHN … months to go.

WINSTON Three ….

JOHN *Ja.* That's what Prinsloo said.

WINSTON John!

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[17] **I wanted to *moer* you**: (Afrikaans) I wanted to fuck (beat) you up.

[*Winston explodes with joy. The men embrace. They dance a jig in the cell. Winston finally tears himself away and starts to hammer on the cell walls so as to pass on the news to other prisoners.*]

Norman! Norman!! John. Three months to go. *Ja* …. Just been told ….

[*Winston's excitement makes John nervous. He pulls Winston away from the wall.*]

JOHN Winston! Not yet, man. We'll tell them at the quarry tomorrow. Let me just live with it for a little while.

WINSTON Okay, okay …. How did it happen?

[*He pulls John down to the floor. They sit close together.*]

JOHN Jesus, I'm so mixed up, man! *Ja* … the door opened and I saw Hodoshe. Ooo God, I said to myself. Trouble! Here we go again! All because of you and the noise you were making. Went down the corridor straight to Number Four … Solitary and Spare Diet!! But at the end, instead of turning right, we turned left into the main block, all the way through it to Prinsloo's office.

WINSTON Prinsloo!

JOHN I'm telling you. Prinsloo himself, man. We waited outside for a little bit, then Hodoshe pushed me in. Prinsloo was behind his desk, busy with some papers. He pulled out one and said to me: 'You are very lucky. Your lawyers have been working on your case. The sentence has been reduced from ten years, to three.'

WINSTON What did Hodoshe say?

JOHN Nothing. But he looked unhappy.

[*They laugh.*]

Hey, something else. Hodoshe let me walk back here by myself! He didn't follow me.

WINSTON Of course. You are free.

JOHN *Haai*, Winston, not yet. Those three months … ! Or suppose it's a trick.

WINSTON What do you mean?

JOHN Those bastards will do anything to break you. If the wheelbarrows and the quarry don't do it, they'll try something else. Remember that last visit of wives, when they lined up all the men on the other side …. 'Take a good look and say goodbye! Back to the cells!'

WINSTON You say you saw Prinsloo?

JOHN Prinsloo himself. Bastard didn't even stand up when I walked in. And by the way … I had to sign. *Ja*! I had to sign a form to say that I had been officially told of the result of my appeal … that I had three months to go. *Ja*. I signed!

WINSTON [*without the slightest doubt*]. It's three months, John.

JOHN [*relaxing and living with the reality for the first time*]. Hell, Winston, at the end of those three months, it will be three years together in this cell. Three years ago I stood in front of that magistrate at Kirkwood – bastard didn't even look at me: 'Ten years!' I watched ten years of my life drift away like smoke from a cigarette while he fidgeted and scratched his arse. That same night back in the prison van to the cells at Rooihel. First time we met!

WINSTON *Ja*. We had just got back from our trial in Cradock.

JOHN You, Temba, …

WINSTON Sipho ….

JOHN Hell, man!

WINSTON First time we got close to each other was the next morning in the yard, when they lined us up for the vans ….

JOHN And married us!

[*They lock left and right hands together to suggest handcuffs.*]

WINSTON Who was that old man … remember him? … in the corner handcuffed to Sipho?

JOHN Sipho?

WINSTON *Ja*, the one who started the singing.

JOHN [*remembering*]. Peter. Tatu[18] Peter.

WINSTON That's him!

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[18] ***Tatu:*** (Xhosa) father, a respectful term/mode of address to an older man.

JOHN Hell, it comes back now, man! Pulling through the big gates, wives and mothers running next to the vans, trying to say goodbye … all of us inside fighting for a last look through the window.

WINSTON [*shaking his head*]. Shit!

JOHN Bet you've forgotten the song the old man started?

[*Winston tries to remember. John starts singing softly. It is one of the Defiance Campaign songs.*[19] *Winston joins in.*]

WINSTON [*shaking his head ruefully*]. By the time we reach Humansdorp though, nobody was singing.

JOHN Fuck singing. I wanted to piss. Hey! I had my one free hand on my balls, holding on. I'd made a mistake when we left the Rooihel. Drank a gallon of water thinking of those five hundred miles ahead. Jesus! There was the bucket in the corner! But we were packed in so tight, remember, we couldn't move. I tried to pull you but it was no bloody good. So I held on – Humansdorp, Storms River, Blaaukrantz … held on. But at Knysna, to hell with it, I let go!

[*Gesture to indicate the release of his bladder. Winston finds this enormously funny. John joins in.*]

You were also wet by then!

WINSTON Never!

JOHN Okay, let's say that by George nobody was dry. Remember the stop there?

WINSTON *Ja.* I thought they were going to let us walk around a bit.

JOHN Not a damn! Fill up with petrol and then on. Hey, but what about those locals, the Coloured prisoners, when we pulled away. Remember? Coming to their cell windows and shouting … 'Courage, Brothers! Courage!' After that … ! Jesus I was tired. Didn't we fall asleep? Standing like that?

WINSTON What do you mean standing? It was impossible to fall.

JOHN Then the docks, the boat …. It was my first time on one. I had nothing to vomit up, but my God I tried.

WINSTON What about me?

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[19] **Defiance Campaign songs**: a reference to the 1952 mass Campaign of passive resistance and defiance against apartheid, when more than 8000 people were arrested.

JOHN Then we saw this place for the first time. It almost looked pretty, hey, with all the mist around it.

WINSTON I was too sick to see anything, *broer.*

JOHN Remember your words when we jumped off onto the jetty?

[*Pause. The two men look at each other.*]

Heavy words, Winston. You looked back at the mountains … 'Farewell Africa!' I've never forgotten them. That was three years ago.

WINSTON And now, for you, it's three months to go.

[*Pause. The mood of innocent celebration has passed. John realizes what his good news means to the other man.*]

JOHN To hell with everything. Let's go to bed.

[*Winston doesn't move. John finds Antigone's wig.*]

We'll talk about Antigone tomorrow.

[*John prepares for bed.*]

Hey, Winston! I just realized. My family! Princess and the children. Do you think they've been told? Jesus, man, maybe they're also saying … three months! Those three months are going to feel as long as the three years. Time passes slowly when you've got something … to wait for ….

[*Pause. Winston still hasn't moved. John changes his tone.*]

Look, in this cell we're going to forget those three months. The whole bloody thing is most probably a trick anyway. So let's just forget about it. We run to the quarry tomorrow. Together. So let's sleep.

Scene 3

The cell, later the same night. Both men are in bed. Winston is apparently asleep. John, however, is awake, rolling restlessly from side to side. He eventually gets up and goes quietly to the bucket for a drink of water, then back to his bed. He doesn't lie down, however. Pulling the blanket around his shoulders, he starts to think about the three months. He starts counting the days on the fingers of one hand. Behind him Winston sits up and watches him in silence for a few moments.

WINSTON [*with a strange smile*]. You're counting!

JOHN [*with a start*]. What! Hey, Winston, you gave me a fright, man. I thought you were asleep. What's the matter? Can't you sleep?

WINSTON [*ignoring the question, still smiling*]. You've started counting the days now.

JOHN [*unable to resist the temptation to talk, moving over to Winston's bed*]. *Ja.*

WINSTON How many?

JOHN Ninety-two.

WINSTON You see!

JOHN [*excited*]. Simple, man. Look … twenty days left in this month, thirty days in June, thirty one in July, eleven days in August … ninety-two.

WINSTON [*still smiling, but watching John carefully*]. Tomorrow?

JOHN Ninety-one.

WINSTON And the next day?

JOHN Ninety.

WINSTON Then one day it will be eighty!

JOHN *Ja!*

WINSTON Then seventy.

JOHN Hey, Winston, time doesn't pass so fast.

WINSTON Then only sixty more days.

JOHN That's just two months here on the Island.

WINSTON Fifty … forty days in the quarry.

JOHN Jesus, Winston!

WINSTON Thirty.

JOHN One month. Only one month to go.

WINSTON Twenty … [*holding up his hands*] then ten … five, four, three, two … tomorrow!

[*The anticipation of that moment is too much for John.*]

JOHN NO! Please, man, Winston. It hurts. Leave those three months alone. I'm going to sleep!

[*Back to his bed, where he curls up in a tight ball and tries determinedly to sleep. Winston lies down again and stares up at the ceiling. After a pause he speaks quietly.*]

WINSTON They won't keep you here for the full three months. Only two months. Then down to the jetty into a ferry-boat … you'll say goodbye to this place … and straight to Victor Verster[20] Prison on the mainland.

[*Against his will, John starts to listen. He eventually sits upright and completely surrenders himself to Winston's description of the last few days of his confinement.*]

Life will change for you there. It will be much easier. Because you won't take Hodoshe with you. He'll stay here with me, on the Island. They'll put you to work in the vineyards at Victor Verster, John. There are no quarries there. Eating grapes, oranges … they'll change your diet … Diet C,[21] and exercises so that you'll look good when they let you out finally. At night you'll play games … Ludo, draughts, snakes and ladders! Then one day they'll call you into the office, with a van waiting outside to take you back. The same five hundred miles. But this time they'll let you sit. You won't have to stand the whole way like you did coming here. And there won't be handcuffs. Maybe they'll even stop on the way so that you can have a pee. Yes, I'm sure they will. You might even sleep over somewhere. Then finally Port Elizabeth. Rooihol Prison again, John! That's very near home, man. New Brighton is next door! Through your cell window you'll see people moving up and down in the street, hear the buses roaring. Then one night you won't sleep again, because you'll be counting. Not days, as you are doing now, but hours. And the next morning, that beautiful morning, John, they'll take you straight out of your cell to the Discharge Office where they'll give you a new khaki shirt, long khaki trousers, brown shoes. And your belongings! I almost forgot about your belongings.

JOHN Hey, by the way! I was wearing a white shirt, black tie, grey flannel trousers … brown Crockett shoes … socks? [*A little laugh.*] I can't remember my socks! A check jacket … and my watch! I was wearing my watch!

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[20] **Victor Verster**: prison for 'politicals' en route to release, in Paarl, near Cape Town.
[21] **Diet C**: most prisoners were kept on the worst diet, Diet D.

WINSTON They'll wrap them up in a parcel. You'll have it under your arm when they lead you to the gate. And outside, John, outside that gate, New Brighton will be waiting for you. Your mother, your father, Princess and the children … and when they open it ….

[*Once again, but more violently this time, John breaks the mood as the anticipation of the moment of freedom becomes too much for him.*]

JOHN Stop it, Winston! Leave those three months alone for Christ's sake. I want to sleep.

[*He tries to get away from Winston, but the latter goes after him. Winston has now also abandoned his false smile.*]

WINSTON [*stopping John as he tries to crawl away*]. But it's not finished, John!

JOHN Leave me alone!

WINSTON It doesn't end there. Your people will take you home. Thirty-eight, Gratten Street, John! Remember it? Everybody will be waiting for you … aunts, uncles, friends, neighbours. They'll put you in a chair, John, like a king, give you anything you want … cakes, sweets, cool drinks … and then you'll start to talk. You'll tell them about this place, John, about Hodoshe, about the quarry, and about your good friend Winston who you left behind. But you still won't be happy, hey. Because you'll need a fuck. A really wild one!

JOHN Stop it, Winston!

WINSTON [*relentless*]. And that is why at ten o'clock that night you'll slip out through the back door and make your way to Sky's place. Imagine it, man! All the boys waiting for you … Georgie, Mangi, Vusumzi. They'll fill you up with booze. They'll look after you. They know what it's like inside. They'll fix you up with a woman ….

JOHN NO!

WINSTON Set you up with her in a comfortable joint, and then leave you alone. You'll watch her, watch her take her clothes off, you'll take your pants off, get near her, feel her, feel it …. *Ja*, you'll feel it. It will be wet ….

JOHN WINSTON!

WINSTON Wet *poes*, John! And you'll fuck it wild!

[John turns finally to face Winston. A long silence as the two men confront each other. John is appalled at what he sees.]

JOHN Winston? What's happening? Why are you punishing me?

WINSTON [*quietly*]. You stink, John. You stink of beer, of company, of *poes*, of freedom …. Your freedom stinks, John, and it's driving me mad.

JOHN No, Winston!

WINSTON Yes! Don't deny it. Three months time, at this hour, you'll be wiping beer off your face, your hands on your balls, and *poes* waiting for you. You will laugh, you will drink, you will fuck and forget.

[John's denials have no effect on Winston.]

Stop bullshitting me! We've got no time left for that. There's only two months left between us. [*Pause.*] You know where I ended up this morning, John? In the quarry. Next to old Harry. Do you know old Harry, John?

JOHN Yes.

WINSTON Yes what? Speak, man!

JOHN Old Harry, Cell Twenty-three, seventy years, serving Life!

WINSTON That's not what I'm talking about. When you go to the quarry tomorrow, take a good look at old Harry. Look into his eyes, John. Look at his hands. They've changed him. They've turned him into stone. Watch him work with that chisel and hammer. Twenty perfect blocks of stone every day. Nobody else can do it like him. He loves stone. That's why they're nice to him. He's forgotten himself. He's forgotten everything … why he's here, where he comes from.

That's happening to me, John. I've forgotten why I'm here.

JOHN No.

WINSTON Why am I here?

JOHN You put your head on the block for others.

WINSTON Fuck the others.

JOHN Don't say that! Remember our ideals ….

WINSTON Fuck our ideals ….

JOHN No, Winston … our slogans, our children's freedom ….

WINSTON Fuck slogans, fuck politics … fuck everything, John. Why am I here? I'm jealous of your freedom, John. I also want to count. God also gave me ten fingers, but what do I count? My life? How do I count it, John? One … one … another day comes … one …. Help me, John! … Another day … one … one …. Help me, brother! … one ….

[*John has sunk to the floor, helpless in the face of the other man's torment and pain. Winston almost seems to bend under the weight of the life stretching ahead of him on the Island. For a few seconds he lives in silence with his reality, then slowly straightens up. He turns and looks at John. When he speaks again, it is the voice of a man who has come to terms with his fate, massively compassionate.*]

Nyana we Sizwe!

[*John looks up at him.*]

Nyana we Sizwe … it's all over now. All over. [*He moves over to John.*] Forget me ….

[*John attempts a last, limp denial.*]

No, John! Forget me … because I'm going to forget you. Yes, I will forget you. Others will come in here, John, count, go, and I'll forget them. Still more will come, count like you, go like you, and I will forget them. And then one day, it will all be over.

[*A lighting change suggests the passage of time. Winston collects their props together for Antigone.*]

Come. They're waiting.

JOHN Do you know your words?

WINSTON Yes. Come, we'll be late for the concert.

Scene 4

The two men convert their cell-area into a stage for the prison concert. Their blankets are hung to provide a makeshift backdrop behind which Winston appears with their props. John comes forward and addresses the audience. He is not yet in his Creon costume.

JOHN Captain Prinsloo, Hodoshe, Warders, … and Gentlemen! Two brothers of the House of Labdacus found themselves on opposite sides in battle, the one defending the State, the other attacking it. They both died on the battlefield. King Creon, Head of the State, decided that the one who had defended the State would be buried with all religious rites due to the noble dead. But the other one, the traitor Polynices, who had come back from exile intending to burn and destroy his fatherland, to drink the blood of his masters, was to have no grave, no mourning. He was to lie on the open fields to rot, or at most be food for the jackals. It was a law. But Antigone, their sister, defied the law and buried the body of her brother Polynices. She was caught and arrested. That is why tonight the Hodoshe Span,[22] Cell Forty-two, presents for your entertainment: 'The Trial and Punishment of Antigone'.

[*He disappears behind the blankets. They simulate a fanfare of trumpets. At its height the blankets open and he steps out as Creon. In addition to his pendant, there is some sort of crown, and a blanket draped over his shoulders as a robe.*]

My People! Creon stands before his palace and greets you! Stop! Stop! What's that I hear? You, good man, speak up. Did I hear 'Hail the King'? My good people, I am your *servant* … a happy one, but still your servant. How many times must I ask you, implore you to see in these symbols of office nothing more, or less, than you would in the uniform of the humblest menial in your house. Creon's crown is as simple, and I hope as clean, as the apron Nanny wears.[23] And even as Nanny smiles and is your happy servant because she sees her charge … your child! … waxing fat in that little cradle, so too does Creon – your obedient servant! – stand here and smile. For what does he see? Fatness and happiness! How else does one measure the success of a state? By the sumptuousness of the palaces built for its king and princes? The magnificence of the temples erected to its gods? The achievements of its scientists and technicians which can now send rockets to the moon? No! These count for nothing beside the fatness and happiness of its people.

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[22] ***Hodoshe Span***: (Afrikaans) the Hodoshe team of prisoners.

[23] **Creon's crown is…as clean as the apron Nanny wears**: John, as Creon, uses a domestic comparison, referring to the common role of black women in white homes, looking after the children.

But have you ever paused to ask yourself whose responsibility it is to maintain that fatness and happiness? The answer is simple, is it not? … your servant the king! But have you then gone on to ask yourself what does the king need to maintain his happy state of affairs? What, other than his silly crown, are the tools with which a king fashions the happiness of his people? The answer is equally simple, my good people. The law! Yes. The law. A three-lettered word, and how many times haven't you glibly used it, never bothering to ask yourselves, 'What, then, is the law?' Or if you have, then making recourse to such clichés as 'the law states this' … or 'the law states that'. The law states or maintains nothing, good people. The law defends! The law is no more or less than a shield in your faithful servant's hand to protect YOU! But even as a shield would be useless in one hand, to defend, without a sword in the other, to strike … so too the law has its edge. The penalty! We have come through difficult times. I am sure it is needless for me to remind you of the constant troubles on our borders … those despicable rats who would gnaw away at our fatness and happiness. We have been diligent in dealing with them. But unfortunately there are still at large subversive elements … there are still amongst us a few rats that are not satisfied, and to them I must show this face of Creon … so different to the one that hails my happy people! It is with a heavy heart, and you shall see why soon enough, that I must tell you that we have caught another one. That is why I have assembled you here. Let what follows be a living lesson for those among you misguided enough still to harbour sympathy for rats! The shield has defended. Now the sword must strike! Bring in the accused.

[*Winston, dressed as Antigone, enters. He wears the wig, the necklace of nails, and a blanket around his waist as a skirt.*]

Your name!

WINSTON Antigone, daughter of Oedipus, sister of Eteocles and Polynices.

JOHN You are accused that, in defiance of the law, you buried the body of the traitor Polynices.

WINSTON I buried the body of my brother Polynices.

JOHN Did you know there was a law forbidding that?

WINSTON Yes.

JOHN Yet you defied it.

WINSTON Yes.

JOHN Did you know the consequences of such defiance?

WINSTON Yes.

JOHN What did you plead to the charges laid against you? Guilty or Not Guilty?

WINSTON Guilty.

JOHN Antigone, you have pleaded guilty. Is there anything you wish to say in mitigation? This is your last chance. Speak.

WINSTON Who made the law forbidding the burial of my brother?

JOHN The State.

WINSTON Who is the State?

JOHN As King I am its manifest symbol.

WINSTON So you made the law.

JOHN Yes, for the State.

WINSTON Are you God?

JOHN Watch your words, little girl!

WINSTON You said it was my chance to speak.

JOHN But not to ridicule.

WINSTON I've got no time to waste on that. Your sentence on my life hangs waiting on your lips.

JOHN Then speak on.

WINSTON When Polynices died in battle, all that remained was the empty husk of his body. He could neither harm nor help any man again. What lay on the battlefield waiting for Hodoshe to turn rotten, belonged to God. You are only a man, Creon. Even as there are laws made by men, so too there are others that come from God. He watches my soul for a transgression even as your spies hide in the bush at night to see who is transgressing your laws. Guilty against God I will not be for any man on this earth. Even without your law, Creon, and the threat of death to whoever defied it, I know I must die. Because of your law and my defiance, that fate is now very near. So much the better. Your threat is nothing to me, Creon. But if I had let my mother's son, a Son of the Land, lie there as food for the carrion fly, Hodoshe, my soul would never have known peace. Do you understand anything of what I am saying, Creon?

JOHN Your words reveal only that obstinacy of spirit which has brought nothing but tragedy to your people. First you break the law. Now you insult the State.

WINSTON Just because I ask you to remember that you are only a man?

JOHN And to add insult to injury you gloat over your deeds! No, Antigone, you will not escape with impunity. Were you my own child, you would not escape full punishment.

WINSTON Full punishment? Would you like to do more than just kill me?

JOHN That is all I wish.

WINSTON Then let us not waste any time. Stop talking. I buried my brother. That is an honourable thing, Creon. All these people in your state would say so too, if fear of you and another law did not force them into silence.

JOHN You are wrong. None of my people think the way you do.

WINSTON Yes they do, but no one dares tell you so. You will not sleep peacefully, Creon.

JOHN You add shamelessness to your crimes, Antigone.

WINSTON I do not feel any shame at having honoured my brother.

JOHN Was he that died with him not also your brother?

WINSTON He was.

JOHN And so you honour the one and insult the other.

WINSTON I shared my love, not my hate.

JOHN Go then and share your love among the dead. I will have no rats' law here while yet I live.

WINSTON We are wasting time, Creon. Stop talking. Your words defeat your purpose. They are prolonging my life.

JOHN [*again addressing the audience*]. You have heard all the relevant facts. Needless now to call the state witnesses who would testify beyond reasonable doubt that the accused is guilty. Nor, for that matter, is it in the best interests of the State to disclose their identity. There was a law. The law was broken. The law stipulated its penalty. My hands are tied.

Take her from where she stands, straight to the Island! There wall her up in a cell for life, with enough food to acquit ourselves of the taint of her blood.

WINSTON [*to the audience*]. Brothers and Sisters of the Land! I go now on my last journey. I must leave the light of day forever, for the Island, strange and cold, to be lost between life and death. So, to my grave, my everlasting prison, condemned alive to solitary death.

[*Tearing off his wig and confronting the audience as Winston, not Antigone.*]

Gods of our Fathers! My Land! My Home!

Time waits no longer. I go now to my living death, because I honoured those things to which honour belongs.

[*The two men take off their costumes and then strike their 'set'. They then come together and, as in the beginning, their hands come together to suggest handcuffs, and their right and left legs to suggest ankle-chains. They start running … John mumbling a prayer, and Winston a rhythm for their three-legged run.*
The siren wails.
Fade to blackout.]

Fugard, A. (1993) *The Township Plays* (ed. D. Walder), Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 194–227 and 231.

Afterword

Lynda Prescott

Afterword

How significant is the idea of authority in the Arts and Humanities? Having now explored this issue from the perspective of Religious Studies, Literature, Music and Classical Studies, you have quite a lot of material on which to base an answer to this question. But, as with most big questions, there is no easy or right answer. We'd certainly want to acknowledge the power and influence of traditions, institutions and the reputations that build up around particular people and particular works. But, as we have seen, traditions and reputations are seldom static, and perhaps of equal importance in the field of Arts and Humanities are the challenges to authority that bring about change (for example, *The Island*, which appeals to the authority of a classical text, and at the same time offers a challenge to the political authority that sustained apartheid). When you move on to Book 3 of *Voices and texts*, in which the discipline of History features prominently, you will have the opportunity to focus on processes of change within a much more concentrated case study.

But for now, what have we learned about voices and texts in relation to this idea of change? One thing that has struck me very forcibly through the examples used in the course of this book is that texts are not always as settled or stable as we assume at first. In Chapter 1, Helen Waterhouse discussed the way that scriptural writings come together in combination, enabling us to take a brief look behind the concept of fixed canons of religious writing and glimpse something of the process of canon formation. In Chapter 2 we saw specific examples of texts that exist in more than one version, reminding us that how and when things are written down, and then modified, really matters. As Sara Haslam noted in her discussion of Donne's poetry, scholars are still arguing about which versions of his poems are the 'right' ones, and Fiona Richards pointed out that even one of the most canonical works of classical music, Handel's *Messiah*, has no single, 'authoritative', score.

More deliberate forms of text-change can come about through the process of translation. Our study of two of the major texts in this Book, the *Metta Sutta* and the *Iliad*, has only been possible because English translations are available, and in Chapter 2 we glanced at many more translated texts, from the Bible to the South African national anthem. Although impersonal systems such as electronic translation programmes can do marvellous things, in the academic field of

Translation Studies – an expanding area of Humanities study – it is recognised that translation is a form of 're-writing' that invests considerable authority in those doing the re-writing.

Another dimension of change affecting some of the texts we have studied is that they may not have started life in the semi-permanent form of writing, but in oral form. In Chapter 3, James Robson's account of the gradual transformation of Homer's *Iliad* from an epic sung by bards at festivals and banquets to a written text standardised by Alexandrian scholars reveals that the process took several centuries. (The same long transition from oral transmission to writing is also true, of course, of the Buddhist sutta we read in Chapter 1.) In Chapter 4 we saw a much swifter move from spoken word to written text in the case of *The Island*, but it is still significant that the play was not actually written down at the time of its first performance, and it went on being adapted in performance by the actors John Kani and Winston Ntshona.

Orality thus turns out to be another important strand in this book. As well as the situations where voices sometimes carry the whole weight of texts before they are written down, we've also encountered voices performing a range of functions: preaching, singing, acting, and so on. These are literal voices, though while we are thinking about voices we might also note some of the metaphorical voices we have encountered, such as those that carry the meanings of poems, or the collective voices of the authorities that select and shape various kinds of canons. Authority will continue to be a major theme throughout this module, so do try to hold on to some of the insights you've developed in the course of Book 1 and bring them back into the frame when you sense they are relevant to the work you will be doing in Books 2 and 3. For now, you will probably want to take a little time to review and reflect briefly on the varied approaches to voices and texts that have been opened up in this book. In particular, you might want to think about how the four academic disciplines represented here differ from each other, not just in terms of the subject matter they deal with, but also in the kinds of questions they ask, and the kinds of skills they require of you. And finally, as part of your reflection, it might also be useful to consider how the different disciplines relate to each other, and what is gained from sometimes taking an interdisciplinary approach to a topic.

When you move on to Book 2 you will encounter two new disciplines, English Language Studies and Creative Writing, deliberately placed alongside each other so that you can examine the basic ingredients from which any verbal composition is constructed. ‘Identity and expression’ is at the centre of Book 2 in more ways than one, and it should provide you with new perspectives to look back on the work you have done here in Book 1, as well as breaking new ground.

Glossary

alliteration

(sometimes known as 'head rhyme'), the repetition of a speech sound, usually a consonant, in a sequence of words. The recurrent sound is generally at the beginning of a word or a stressed syllable.

aria

the Italian word for 'air'. Although it carries a number of meanings in relation to music, it is most commonly used to describe an expressive piece written for solo voice. Arias are featured in large-scale vocal works including operas, oratorios and cantatas.

baritone

a type of male voice between tenor and bass.

Baroque

the Baroque period in music lasted from about 1600 until about 1750.

beat

see **pulse**.

blank verse

unrhymed lines of iambic pentameter. Not to be confused with free verse, blank verse was the dominant verse form in early modern drama, favoured by Marlowe, Shakespeare and their contemporaries.

chord

a musical chord is formed when two or more **pitches** are played simultaneously together as one unit. The adjective used to describe a texture using a succession of chords is 'chordal'.

Classical

the Classical period in western music is used as a description of music of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The leading exponents of the style known as Classical are Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–91), Joseph Haydn (1732–1809), Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) and Franz Schubert (1797–1828).

concerto

the concerto is an important musical genre. Developed during the **Baroque** period (about 1600–1750), it is a work for solo instrument and orchestra.

contrapuntal

see **counterpoint**.

counterpoint

textural interweaving of different melodic and rhythmic patterns. The adjective is 'contrapuntal'.

dhamma

the **Pali** term for the truth of how things are, and practices that lead to knowledge and understanding of that truth.

dynamics

the term used to describe the range of volume or loudness in a piece of music. A variety of dynamics in a piece can create contrast and add to the expressive content: *forte* (*f*) is loud; *piano* (*p*) is quiet.

epic poem

'epic' is the name given to long, narrative poems concerning the deeds of gods, heroes and men, the oldest surviving example of which is Homer's *Iliad*. The term derives from the Greek for 'word' (*epos*). Epic poetry characteristically adheres to set conventions, such as the inclusion of lengthy speeches and repeated phrases. Characteristic of Greek and Latin epic is the fact that it is composed in a poetic metre known as dactylic hexameter.

harmony

in music, harmony is created when different **pitches** are played together at the same time. Some harmonies are consonant, which means the pitches are blended together to make pleasing sounds that are easy to listen to. Others are dissonant, where sounds created by certain pitch combinations are relatively harsh and grating. Two or more pitches played simultaneously together as one unit are called a **chord**.

imitation

in music, a technique where voices or instruments imitate one another.

karma

the **Sanskrit** word for action. The word implies the idea that whatever is done in this life is influenced by the circumstances of previous lives and that actions in this life will in turn influence lives to come.

librettist

see **libretto**.

libretto

the text for an extended vocal work, particular an opera. The writer of such a text is called a librettist.

meditation

a practice used for religious and therapeutic purposes. In Buddhism there are two types of meditation: meditation to calm the mind and meditation to develop understanding of **dhamma**.

melody

a 'melody' or 'tune' is created by combining **rhythm** and **pitch**. The way in which these two elements are manipulated to create melody can produce a range of effects. A melody can be constructed from several **phrases**.

nibbana

the **Pali** term (in **Sanskrit** the term is nirvana) used in Buddhism to refer to the highest possible happiness. It means literally 'blowing out'. The things that are blown out are the 'fires' of greed, hatred and ignorance, which prevent ordinary people from being happy.

nirvana

see **nibbana**

Oedipus

in Greek mythology, Oedipus was the son of Laius, ruler of Thebes. As a baby he was cast out by his parents and when he grew up he unwittingly killed his own father and married his own mother.

opera buffa

a type of lighthearted or comic opera popular in the **Classical** period.

Pali

an ancient language developed in the Indian subcontinent and used to record early Buddhist texts.

pass laws

leglislation introduced by the South African government in 1923 and again in 1952 to restrict the movements of non-whites. The 1952 Act made it compulsory for all black Africans over the age of 16 to carry 'passbooks' at all times. The passbook provided proof of permission (or proof that permission had not been granted) to live and/or work in a specific area. Failure to produce a passbook on demand meant arrest and automatic penalties, including imprisonment.

phrase

a musical phrase is a short, self-contained group of notes, rather like a phrase in writing or speaking.

pitch

the way in which notes sound high or low in relation to one another.

pulse

the regular pattern of stresses (referred to individually as beats) that runs throughout a piece of music. In vernacular language 'the beat' is often used more generally to describe the pulse. Music almost always has a pulse, but in some pieces it is clearer to hear than in others.

quatrain

a four-line stanza-form, very common in English poetry, with a range of possible **rhyme schemes**.

register

a distinctive use of language, written or spoken, for a particular situation.

rhyme scheme

the order and arrangement of rhymes, either throughout a whole poem or in a typical stanza.

rhythm

in music, the way in which sounds are distributed over time, but, unlike the **pulse**, these sounds can last for varied lengths of time. Some notes are short and will seem to move fast, while others will last longer and could seem to move more slowly. Some rhythms are even and smooth, while others are uneven. One way to think about the relationship between rhythm and pulse is to think about speech. Speech tends to have rhythm, but it does not necessarily have a regular pulse.

Sanskrit

an ancient Indian language used primarily for religious texts.

shebeen

an unlicensed establishment selling alcohol to black Africans, who, under apartheid, could not enter bars reserved for white people.

simile

a figure of speech in which two different things are explicitly compared, using the words ‘like’ or ‘as’.

sutta

the **Pali** term for a thread. A text from the Buddhist tradition that is said to have been composed by the Buddha.

tempo

the term used to describe the speed of the music, which can be thought of as the rate of **pulse**. Music with a slow pulse will go slowly, while music with a fast pulse will seem to move at greater speed. To create contrast and interest composers often vary the tempo within a piece of music.

texture

in music, the term is used to refer to the ways in which different lines of music interweave. The simplest musical texture is a single unaccompanied melodic line, while combinations of voices and instruments playing different parts simultaneously create more complex musical textures.

timbre

the different sound qualities of instruments and voices. Individual instruments have their own timbres.

tipitaka

the collection of Buddhist texts. Literally ‘the three baskets’.

unison

all instruments or voices playing the same notes.

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Text

Extract on pages 28–9: 'Karaniya Metta Sutta: The Buddha's Words on Loving-kindness' (Khp 9), translated from the Pali by The Amaravati Sangha. *Access to Insight*, 17 June 2010, http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/khp/khp.9.amar.html. Extracts on pages 80–1 and 83: Adams, J. (2008) *Hallelujah Junction*. Faber and Faber Limited. Readings 2.5 and 2.6: Warner/Chappell Music Limited. Poem on page 103 and Reading 3.4: Longley, M. (2006) *Collected Poems*. Random House. Readings 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3: Homer, *The Illiad*. Translation by Ian Johnston, Malaspina University-College, Nanaimo, BC, Canada. Reading 4.1: Fugard, A. et al. (1993) *The Township Plays*. By Permission of Oxford University Press and the author.

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A150 Voices and texts

The Voices and Texts of Authority

Authority is a familiar concept in many aspects of everyday life. In this first book of *Voices and texts* we explore the way in which authority is constructed and put to use in the field of Arts and Humanities. The first half of the book focuses on canons, or lists of 'approved' works, and the closely related idea of 'classics.' We begin with Religious Studies, as we examine a canonical Buddhist text, the *Metta Sutta*. The following chapter discusses the concept of canons in relation to Literature, examining the writings of a seventeenth-century author, John Donne, and to Music, using a range of examples including a musical setting of Donne's poetry.

The second half of the book introduces the idea of 'remaking authority,' and we analyse texts that consciously and creatively draw on literary traditions. A further academic discipline, Classical Studies, provides the focus of study here, as we explore how Homer's *Iliad* has been presented and re-presented to modern English-speaking audiences. In the final chapter, we turn to drama, to consider the way in which a different classical text, Sophocles' play *Antigone*, underpins a short South African drama, *The Island*, created during the era of apartheid.

Using a range of examples, the book as a whole shows how authority comes to be associated with particular texts and voices, and how traditions are invoked and sometimes challenged.

Lynda Prescott, Staff Tutor and Senior Lecturer in English at The Open University

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